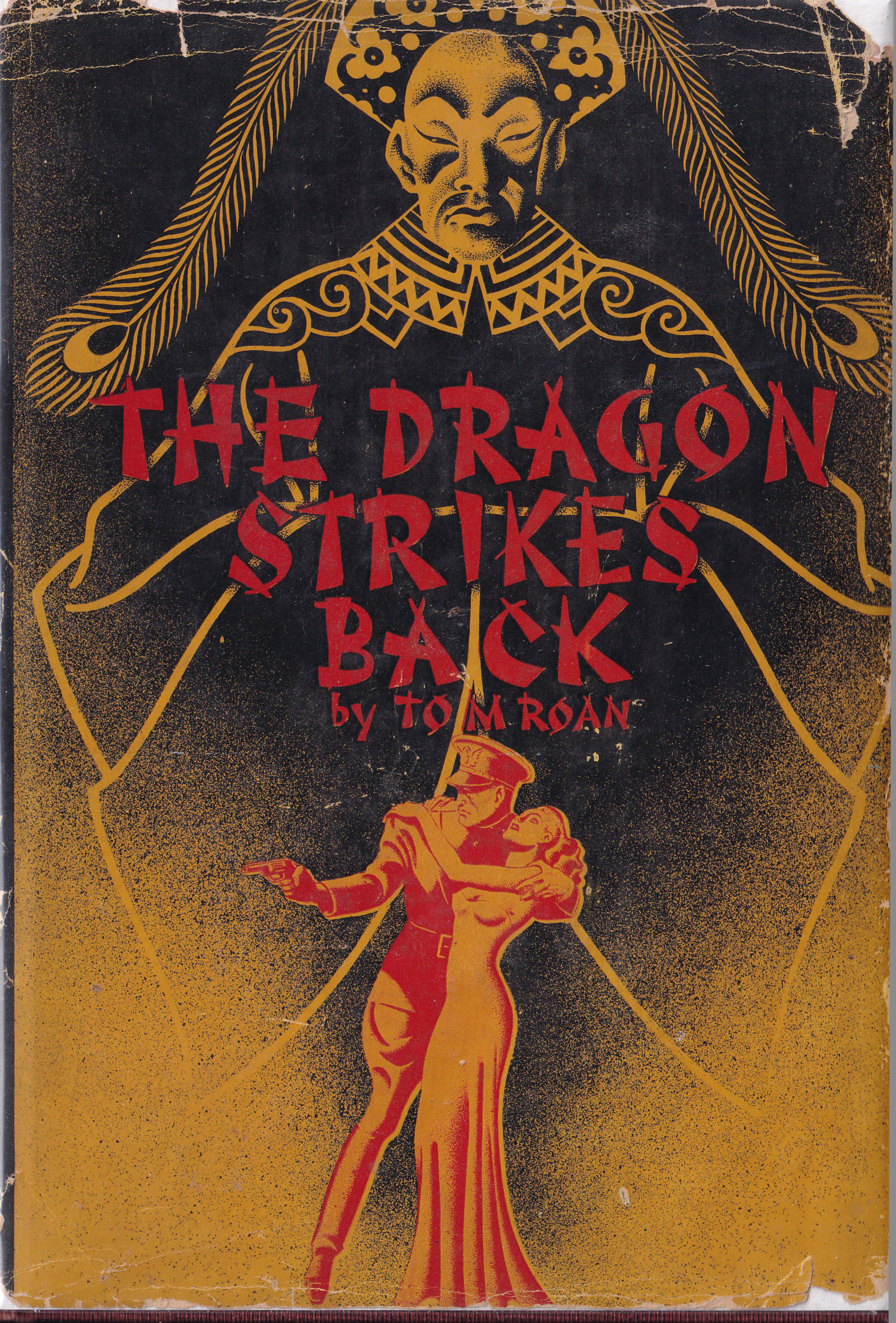

THE DRAGON STRIKES BACK

by TOM ROAN

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THE
DRAGON
STRIKES
BACK

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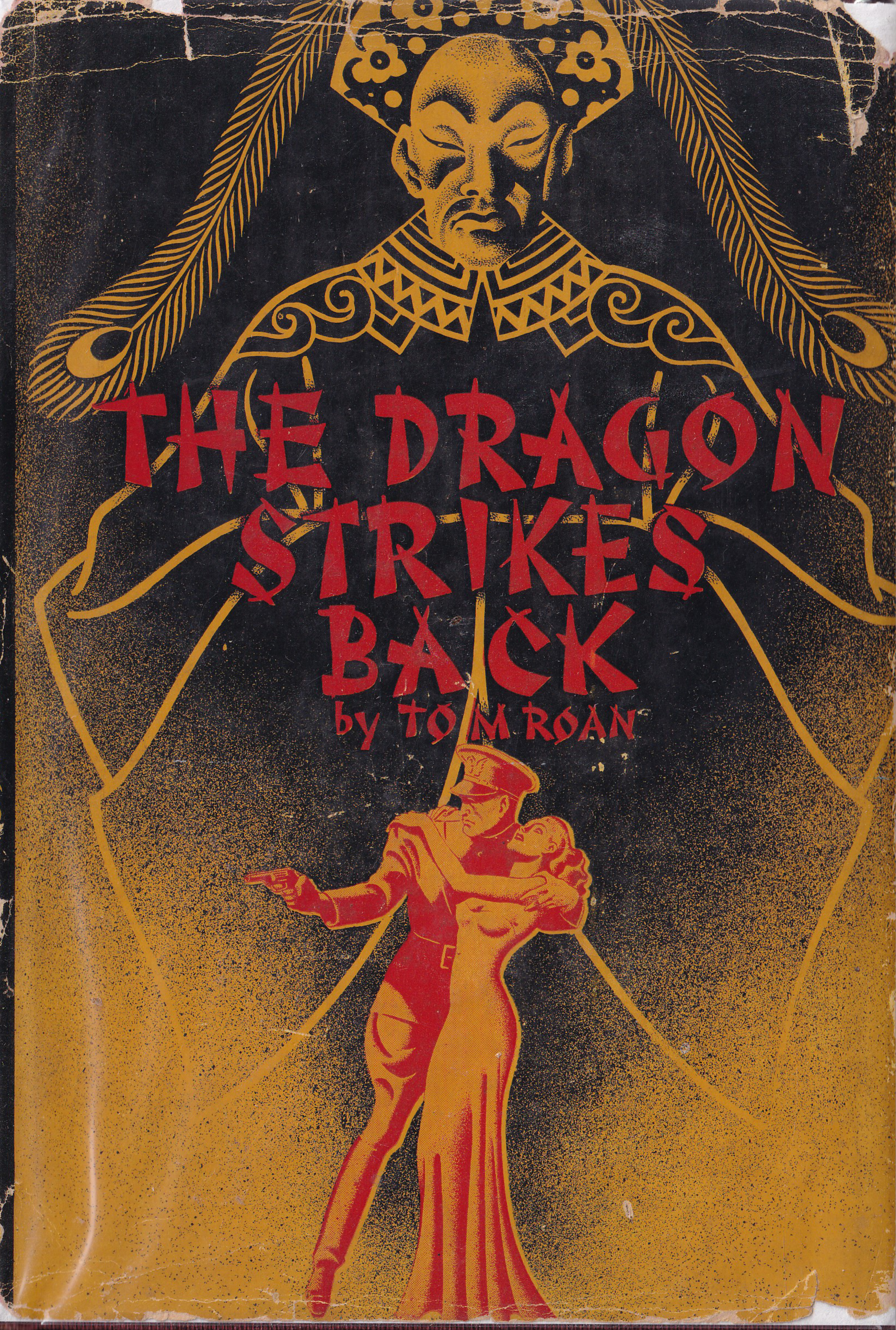

THE DRAGON STRIKES BACK

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The Dragon Strikes Back

By TOM ROAN

The kidnapping of Holly Blunt, daughter of Vice-Admiral Beauregard Blunt, of the U. S. Navy, climaxed a series of events that threatened the peace of two countries. Two Japanese ships, peacefully navigating the North Pacific, had been sunk by a submarine flying the American flag; Admiral Takemura, of the Japanese Navy, had mysteriously disappeared one evening, and next morning his skeleton had been found, garbed in evening dress, propped jauntily against a lamp post on San Francisco's busiest street corner, a prominent Japanese importer had met the same fate.

Telegrams flew back and forth between Washington and "Old Eternity Bill" Mandell of the U. S. Secret Service in San Francisco. The diplomatic roof was about to blow off when Big Bill got into action. But his right hand man, Captain Andrew Lee, had been too much in love with Holly Blunt to wait. He had discovered a passageway from Admiral Blunt's house that led through the maze of San Francisco's sewers, and he had gone alone on a search that could only end in disaster.

Tom Roan makes it all live — the blood-curdling horrors that Holly and Lee experience before Mandell can get to them. THE DRAGON STRIKES BACK is packed with terrific suspense and drama, and is flavored with an under-current of emotional power that comes with the facing of almost unsurmountable odds.

TOM ROAN

THE DRAGON STRIKES BACK

JULIAN MESSNER

THE DRAGON
STRIKES BACK

THE DRAGON STRIKES BACK

BY
TOM ROAN

NEW YORK
JULIAN MESSNER, Inc.

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8 WEST 40TH STREET
NEW YORK

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE MONTAUK BOOKBINDING CORPORATION

TO

HYMAN ROSEN

OF

BROOKLYN

WHOSE UNSWERVING LOYALTY

AMAZES ME BEYOND MEASURE

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THE DRAGON
STRIKES BACK

CHAPTER I

FAT IN THE FIRE

JAPANESE SHIP ATTACKED BY SUBMARINE OFF CALIFORNIA COAST

AMERICAN COAST GUARD VESSELS RUSHING TOWARD SCENE. FOG AND LOW VISIBILITY THREATEN POSSIBILITY OF RESCUE!

"Come quick. We are sinking rapidly. Submarine flying American flag arose at close range off our starboard and discharged two torpedoes that struck us squarely amidships. Little opportunity of launching our lifeboats. We ——"

And there the message, coming from scarcely a hundred miles west of the Golden Gate, ended abruptly at 6:07 p.m. today from the *S.S. Shonosuke,* bound from Nagasaki to the United States with a dozen high Japanese government officials on the passenger list. . . .

COMING out of the dark, fog and rain-drizzled Pacific Ocean, the startling news was a body-blow straight to the nervous system of the entire world. Mobs of excited people filled San Francisco's streets. At every hand newsboys were screaming and waving their extras. The Thursday headlines of that damp, fog-ridden January evening were as alarming as bombshells suddenly exploding in the dusky quiet of some old country churchyard.

In a few hours that half-mysterious voice of wireless and cable had carried the story around the world. By midnight many things were happening that threatened the peace of the earth. Japanese students—fanatic with the fever of excitement, suspicion and natural race-hatred—were rioting in Tokyo. Japanese troops had been called out and flung in a double cordon with fixed bayonets around the American embassy. Other rioting was springing to the fore in other parts of the empire. It spread like a fish-tailing wind across the ocean, breaking out in Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The arrogance of the Japanese was asserting itself. In hastily collected mobs they were charging civic buildings in all the larger cities of the United States. Police at first drove them back with tear-bombs, then nightsticks, then gun-butts, and, finally, with disastrous volleys from their revolvers.

"Midnight oil" burned in Washington. Little brown men from the Japanese embassy, all talking in highly excited voices and gesticulating wildly, trotted nervously in and out the corridors of the White House. The Navy Department had come to life. Telegraph and wireless instruments buzzed and clattered with all the rapid-fire hustle and bustle of a press-box at the ringside of some world's heavyweight championship fight. Every submarine base of the United States was questioned. From every point on the compass the news was being flashed back that all submarines were in their stations and their commanders and crews "present or accounted for."

Long before morning, fast cruisers and Coast Guard cutters were in action. They scouted up and down the Pacific Coast from Oregon to San Pedro. In the meanwhile, message after message had come in from the Coast Guard vessels that had gone at full-speed toward the scene of the mysterious calamity. And one message was like another. They all had the same, doleful beginning that read:

> "No trace as yet of the stricken craft. Fog and low visibility hindering our progress."

Daylight came at last. Then from the Pacific Ocean came the first message from the approximate location of the sunken *Shonosuke.* It stated briefly that two cutters and a light-armored cruiser were at the scene of the disaster. The area was covered with oil and occasional floatings of wreckage. There were no survivors. The *S.S. Shonosuke,* it was estimated, had gone down in a hundred and forty fathoms, and that meant, at least for the time, that any further story of the vessel's disaster was locked in the bosom of the sea.

Many European newspapers immediately predicted that the fat was in the fire. It was really in the fire aboard the United States Battleship *Colorado,* lying alongside the U. S. Army Transport Docks. The ship had been moved in from her moorings in San Francisco Bay and had literally become a human beehive of activity. Admiral Isota Takemura—on his way home from some naval conference in Washington and only waiting in San Francisco for a steamer to take him back to Japan—came aboard.

He was about sixty, taller than the average Japanese—a thin man with a sharp, hatchet-like face, the usual liquid-brown, almond-shaped eyes and a narrow, sophisticated strip of bristly black mustache, he was in full uniform from cocked hat to sword. With him had come Y. Takahasha, the consulate—a short, highly nervous little man strutting with excitement—and a swarm of attendants. Shortly after their arrival had come the mayor of San Francisco, followed by a swarm of U. S. Secret Service men. None of them had been to bed during the long night.

Vice-Admiral Beauregard Blunt, of the Pacific Fleet, stood like a man of iron behind his big desk. He was square-shouldered, square-jawed, with silver-gray hair pompadoured backward from a high, broad forehead. His face was like his name, a broad, stout face, aggressive, dominated by an iron will, yet, at all times, a calm face with its stubborn jaw, the firm, commanding lips and the stiff, neatly-clipped mustaches twisted upward.

There was no excitement in Admiral Blunt's bearing. In the blue, gold-braided uniform of his rank, he had stood there, a most apologetic gentleman, listening attentively to the double broadsides of questions and the caustic demands of his distinguished Japanese callers. His mien was that of sympathy personified, yet beneath it all he was a soldier in the true sense, and facing a situation with a calm that was at times startling in its intensity. Several times during the lengthy flow of words, he had offered Admiral Takemura and the bristling little Takahasha seats, but they had ignored them.

"Washington," Blunt had answered patiently, "has full charge of the situation, gentlemen. The entire Pacific Fleet is coöperating and following instructions in every detail. We hope to have something of importance to report——"

"But does it penetrate your faculties of realization, sir," suddenly raged Admiral Takemura, pacing back and forth across the cabin with the springiness of a lion, "that the outrage—this unspeakable outrage, sir!—has brought about a tremendous danger to your people? Does it, or does it not, sir, occur to you that the whole of the Japanese Empire is aroused by this inexcusable tragedy to which your country—and your country alone!—must make satisfactory and immediate answer?"

"I am, sir," bowed Blunt, stiffly, "well aware of all the unfortunate details. I have assured you, or attempted to assure you, that we are doing all in our power, and that we will continue our efforts until we have accomplished definite results, satisfactory not only to ourselves but to the people of Japan as well. You must know that the tragedy is the result of the activity of a yet unknown hand and has—for the present, at least—no bearing whatever on the government of the United States."

"Which, sir," it was Takemura's turn to bow, "must yet be determined to the satisfaction—the absolute satisfaction, sir!—of the rulers and the people of Japan!"

"The Pacific Fleet ——"

"Is doing all it can!" interrupted Takemura. "It seems, sir, if you will pardon me for reminding you of the simple truth, that I have been so informed of this and it needs not a repetition. Yet," his lips twisted with a dry smile, "at the pier here, with half her crew ashore, lies one of your government's most able ships ——"

"Which has been mentioned before, sir!" A hint of irritation had entered Blunt's tone for the first time. "As we both know, and as I have explained, it would be foolhardy to send a vessel of this weight and speed to sea to search for a lone submarine when there are some of our fastest cruisers and coast guard ships already in command of the search."

"But we demand ——"

"I can but express my regrets to you, sir." Again Blunt bowed. "Already Washington has asked the coöperation of all other nations to ascertain, if possible, where the submarine came from and how and why it came to be lurking like some monster in the waters off our shores. It is not the policy of the government of the United States to shirk her duty to any country ——"

"Is it necessary, Admiral Blunt," put in Takahasha with a frown, "to—as you Americans say—side-step each and every question put before you?"

"I have side-stepped no questions," answered Blunt, wearily. "I no more know the motive behind the disaster than either of you. It is an unfortunate thing. It is a most terrible thing! I cannot begin to express the regrets of my country, gentlemen ——"

"And yet," again cut in Takahasha, smiling and suddenly becoming almost hellishly polite, "I believe Admiral Takemura has repeatedly informed you of the immediate danger your country must suffer for the consequences ——"

"I know of no consequences liable to endanger," Blunt was holding up his hand for silence, "either country in this thing. Most certainly I could not be condemned of murder simply, sir, because you or someone else happened to put on my hat and walked out in it to commit a crime."

"Yet it was known throughout the United States," Takemura had straightened as stiffly as a ramrod, "that there were certain notables aboard the ill-fated vessel who were not—er—particularly friendly to the United States government, mainly because of her exclusion of Japanese subjects from her shores. Perhaps even the admiral read an editorial not many days ago, one that appeared in one of your vast newspaper chains, concerning the peaceful delegation enroute to this country. Our gentlemen were likened to beggars ——"

"I read no such an editorial ——"

"—— inasmuch," Takemura was going right on, smiling blandly now, "that they were accused of coming to these shores with open hands and empty purses ——"

"—— though there might have been one or a dozen," Blunt was still doggedly going on, "I cannot see that it adds materially to the tragedy in either direction. This is a free country. Free speech is accorded all our people. But, sir," a growing fire seemed to be kindling at last in Blunt's old sea-dog fighting eyes, "we do not allow our people to attack and sink an unarmed vessel laden with women and children."

"We have not accused you of that!" snapped Takahasha, stepping forward arrogantly, "but, sir, your apparent indifference to our demands is amazing!"

For a few moments Blunt was silent. He looked helplessly at the assemblage in front of him—at the drawn-up line of the admiral's and Takahasha's escorts; at the mayor's red face in the background; at the secret service men ranging along the bulkhead, and at a swarm of newspaper reporters who had filled the passageway to the after deck. Beyond the latter, over their heads, loomed a turret of the *Colorado's* guns, immense engines of destruction painted with peace-time colors, their muzzles covered. Blunt looked tired. He finally spoke, and he spoke slowly, carefully, a man trying to hold the temper of a wild stallion that was beginning to prance in his blood.

"I am very sorry," he bowed, this time with an ill-concealed stiffness, "if my demeanor arouses the antagonism of either of you gentlemen. The admiral as well as you, Mr. Takahasha, is fully aware of the position of all concerned in a crisis like this. The matter, as I have stated, is being handled in Washington. No doubt your country is being kept fully informed of every angle of the situation. I am sorry that I cannot enlighten you more than I have ——"

"You have not, if I may be permitted to once again express a fact," bowed Admiral Takemura curtly, "enlightened us at all, Admiral Blunt!"

"True," smiled Blunt. "I am yet, as Americans say it, as much in the dark on this thing ——"

"May I suggest," cut in Takahasha, again bowing, "that the United States government very presently will hear from Japan?"

"No doubt about it!" It looked as if Blunt was going to laugh. "There is little doubt, sir, that the government has already 'heard' ——"

"This means war, sir!" snapped Takemura, suddenly planting his hands on the desk and leaning toward Blunt belligerently. "War, sir, unless a most satisfactory explanation is forthcoming immediately!"

"I believe, sir," bowed Blunt with his old patience, "that the question of war is a matter for much larger heads than ours to decide. It is a matter, if I am not terribly mistaken, for Washington and Tokyo to conclude."

"You realize, do you not," Takahasha was actually sneering, "that the wrath of the imperial government of Japan means disaster to any country in the world today who may allow herself to incur it? You realize, do you not, that we are no longer a country to be ignored by the so-called 'greater powers' of the world?"

"Mr. Takahasha!" Admiral Blunt's sea-voice filled the cabin. He had leaned forward, his hands now gripping the desk. His eyes were a cold sea-blue. His face had hardened, lips tightening. It seemed that he had forgotten everything else in the cabin except the two arrogant faces there in front of him. "Mr. Takahasha, the situation is very unfortunate. But don't come here to threaten me, Mr. Takahasha. The United States has always stood squarely on its own feet. We have been to war before, and if you have read your history, then surely you must know that we have shown that we, too, have teeth in our mouths and fighting guts in our bellies. We are very sorry for what has happened. We will go to the bottom of it. But, Mr. Takahasha," he lifted a stubby forefinger, pointing it at the man's face like a pistol, "I want you to *get* this. I don't want you to misunderstand me, Mr. Takahasha. Now, sir, we do not give a good God damn about the wrath of Japan!"

CHAPTER II

UNRUFFLED MR. MANDELL

ADMIRAL TAKEMURA and Mr. Takahasha left the *Colorado* in a state of complete disillusionment and with the somewhat courteous but decidedly firm command from Admiral Blunt to, "Get the hell ashore before I kick you ashore!"

They were sorely disgruntled men. They were grossly offended, but, at the same time, they were unable to tell themselves just what they were to do about it. Whipping the Russians at Port Arthur had given them an exaggerated opinion of themselves. Fighting ragged, half-starved Chinese—fighting them by dropping bombs on shacks of houses with no protection, not as much as an ancient cross-bow, and meeting handfuls of China's soldiers with tubes of rust for guns, poor ammunition and no military training—had given them even a higher opinion of themselves.

Very certain of themselves, their arrogance tuned to perfection, they had been highly important gentlemen when they had gone aboard the *Colorado*. A recent quarrel in London over naval matters had further bolstered their opinions. They had found themselves excellent bluffers. The white race, they had decided, were fools, a race with no more desire to fight than tottering, helpless old China. But they came away from the *Colorado* with curses carefully bridled in their throats and followed by their attendants, neither of them feeling it desirable or true to good policy to express themselves, even to the grim-jawed American Marines or sailors standing as stiffly as gate-posts at the head of the gangplank.

The story spread rapidly. There was much speculation, but, as a whole, American business men kept out of it. It had all been so sudden and so unexpected that there had been no opportunity to figure the profit or loss in the event of war between the two countries.

Munition manufacturers, however, were a trifle bolder. They sharpened their pencils and gathered like thieves in the dark getting ready for a major crime. War was an exceptionally good thing for some, a rotten business for others. It had its own ironical way of making millionaires out of near-paupers overnight. At the same time, it had its uncanny way of reducing millionaires to paupers. One had to be careful.

Even the newspapers were careful. They were expressing their regrets within two hours after the unfortunate incident aboard the *Colorado* had spread across the nation and the seas and was already appearing on the streets of London and Tokyo. A few of the papers took a decided stand against Admiral Blunt, recalling his "hot-headedness" on other occasions. There would be a "call-down" from Washington. Of that some of the papers were certain, but all of them left loop-holes, even as the business men left holes in which to leap with a sudden change of opinion.

In the meanwhile, Washington had been stumbling along with the Japanese embassy threatening and storming, even as Takemura and Takahasha had attempted to storm aboard the *Colorado.* The nation's cream of Secret Service agents were dispatched to the Pacific Coast by the fastest air-liners. But even before they arrived another startling blow to the peace of the world had come out of the dark, winter-bound Pacific Ocean.

It was the story of another disaster, one that had happened three days before the sinking of the *S.S. Shonosuke.* It came at ten o'clock Friday evening, winging its way through the ether from an American tanker northeast of the Hawaiian Islands and bound for Japan with a cargo of fuel-oil. It was a message that again set the world to buzzing.

> "Picked up lifeboat in L 44:58 N L 136:43W containing seven Japanese sailors from the *S.S. Miiki,* bound from Coos Bay, Oregon, to Yokohama, with a cargo of lumber. Men state

their ship was fired upon and sunk by submarine flying American flag which first shot down their wireless masts and then discharged torpedo in their amidships at dawn Monday morning. All hands except the seven picked up seem to have gone down.

S.S. Sweet Cove."

Up in a dingy office on the top floor of the Federal Building at 7th and Mission Streets, the story of the tragedy was received calmly. The two men at the big desk in the center of the room read the news in silence. They looked at each other across the desk, and nodded. One of the men was immense, about sixty-three, enormously fat and bald save for a ruffle of bushy gray hair growing in the shape of a silver half-moon from his ears to the back of his head. He even chuckled a little as he took off his nose glasses and rubbed his mild-blue eyes with a stubby forefinger.

"Old Eternity Bill" Mandell was like that. Forty years in the United States Secret Service had not robbed him of the ability to chuckle under the most trying circumstances. "As long as you can chuckle you're not licked!" had been his life-long philosophy. He laid his glasses carefully on the wide, dull-green pad in front of him. He took a fat cigar from his pocket and sniffed it with an air of appreciation. He bit off the end of it, struck a match, and puffed at it wheezingly. With the end of the cigar glowing a bright cherry-red, he rolled his huge bulk back in his chair and planted the heels of his big, blunt-toed black shoes on the desk, a characteristic habit when enjoying a good smoke and, at the same time, deliberating a case.

The man across the table was about thirty, lean-hipped, big-shouldered and about five feet and ten inches tall. His eyes were gray and grave. A certain amount of boyishness was in his face with its smooth, high forehead, the dark, half-curling hair and the rather wide but good-natured mouth. An old Virginia military academy and seven years as a cavalry officer in the United States Army had left their indelible stamp upon Captain Andrew Lee.

"Our fox seems to be growing, Andy." Mandell removed his cigar slowly from his mouth and blew a puff of smoke toward the ceiling. A strong case was generally a "fox" to him. He rarely called such cases anything else.

"By leaps and bounds, Bill," nodded Lee. "Have you any ideas ——"

"None, Andy, my boy!" Mandell chuckled his old chuckle, and looked at his cigar with downright affection. "If I were capable of such things I would have been retired years ago and living back down on the old farm in Iowa where the tall corn grows. As it is, instead of watching the green corn grow in the summer and roasting chestnuts by the fire in a good, snug house in winter—well, I'm still viewing these things." He waved a big hand toward the thick stack of official telegrams piled on the desk. "The government wastes a lot of money on those things, Andy. Why, I could buy a litter of pigs or a fair-to-middling milk cow with the money Washington's spent on those things. Think of it!"

"That's the hell of it, Bill!" Captain Lee lighted a cigarette, and stood up, driving his hands deep into the pockets of his blue serge coat. "Look here, if we only knew where to begin the thinking, then we might get started on this thing. As it is, we sit here looking at the ceiling ——"

"Or answering telegrams," nodded Mandell, looking at his cigar again and rolling it between a stubby thumb and forefinger. "You've been only a couple of years with the Secret Service, Andy. You'll learn patience, my boy. Yes, sir," he clamped the cigar back in his mouth, "*patience.* First, you have to learn that you must allow yourself so much time for answering telegrams. No matter what happens or what is happening, you must stop and answer telegrams! They're important, Andy. I've never really found out why they're important, but they are something you must answer. You get one that asks, 'What are you doing on case so-and-so?' You answer, 'Nothing to report so far.' Right back at you comes another, 'What *have* you done on case so-and-so?' To keep from overtaxing your brain, you answer, 'So far nothing to report.' That 'nothing so far' and 'so far nothing' is usually good for the first ten or twelve days. Two weeks, even, in the holiday season! By the end of that time something will suggest itself. Yes, sir! Brilliant flashes, you might say, Andy, that come to you without undue strain on your mental capacities. Oh, like, 'We regret to report that so far our investigations have reached no definite conclusion.' That helps things materially, Andy. It shows them back in Washington that you are getting busy, working harder. Why, your answer shows it. Your first telegrams contain only five words. Then, all of a sudden they jump to fourteen! 'Splendid!' they say in Washington. 'The boys are hard at it!' They'll even give the press a little story ——"

"Look here, Bill, stop your horse-play!" ordered Lee, sternly. "This is a serious thing, you confounded old reprobate! We are virtually facing war with the Japs. They're a panicky outfit, Bill, always suspicious, always afraid the Americans are going to do this thing and that. Why, Bill, you know ——"

"Yes, Andy, but just a minute, Andy!" Old Eternity Bill Mandell held up his hand. It looked as large as a ham. He turned his face toward the door as if intently listening for the repetition of some sound. His eyes had become drawn, almost beady. "Just a minute."

"What is it?" Lee's voice had instinctively lowered. Hands on the desk, he was leaning close to Mandell and staring at the door.

"Is the door locked?" Mandell's tone had dropped to a low, sibilant whisper.

"Yes," Lee's answer had automatically dropped to a whisper, "it's locked."

"Are you sure, Andy?" Mandell spoke even lower than before. "Can't be no mistake?"

"Yes," nodded Lee. "I am positive, Bill."

"That's good." Mandell rubbed his enormous stomach and patted it fondly. He reached with his left hand toward the handle of a drawer. "Be a nice boy now, Andy, and bring me a glass of cool water. My rheumatism is bothering. Giving me a pain in the neck. Be nice to me, Andy. You may be an old bat like me, yourself, one of these days."

"Well, I'll be damned!" barked Lee; yet he walked across the room to the big water-cooler in the corner. He returned with a tall glass of water, sitting it on the pad in front of Mandell. Mandell was uncorking a quart bottle of Bourbon.

"There! I hope it chokes the daylights out of you, you old fraud!"

"You haven't been in this game for forty years, son," grinned the old detective. "You had a nice job in the Army. Should have stayed with it. Nice horsie to ride about on. Pretty uniforms to wear. Nice things for the girls to look at. Why, you might have had a chance to get married, Andy. Think of it! A pretty girl to cuddle up to on cold nights and her shirt-tail to keep your feet warm. Bully, my boy, bully! Maybe a couple of little dingy-dingies coming along to call you 'papa.' Then there were the regular hours to go to bed. No all-night monkey business. Do you know, Andy, my boy, there are times when I think you were seventeen shades of Balaam's ass to let the government shift you over in this game!"

"Right now," nodded Lee grimly, "I am thinking the same thing!"

"But it's too late now. Too late." Mandell shook his head sadly. With the cork removed from the bottle, he took an empty glass from the drawer. It was a dirty glass, stained and dust collected in the bottom. He blew into it, then slopped it half-full of Bourbon. "Too late, my boy, too late."

He downed his drink with Lee standing there staring at him.

"A-ham-mm-mm!" Mandell licked his lips. He took a sip of water, recorked the bottle, returning it and the glass to the big drawer with a sigh. "Nature's remedy, good for almost anything, Andy, from snake-bite to poison oak. I ——"

There was a sharp rapping on the door. Lee crossed the room, opening it. A uniformed youth stood there. It was another message from Washington.

"What does it say this time, Andy?" asked Mandell, lazily, as Lee closed the door and walked back to the desk ripping open the yellow envelope.

"Same old thing!" Lee's lips twisted sourly. " 'What have you to report?' "

"What did I send them an hour ago, Andy?"

" 'Nothing to report so far.' "

"All right," nodded Mandell. "Send 'em 'So far nothing to report' this time, Andy."

"But, look here, Bill!" ordered Lee. "This can't go on. This is no ordinary case, I tell you. It is not one that we have all the time in the world to handle. *We must do something!*"

"Very well, Andy," Mandell eased forward, planting his heavy forearms on the desk. "Neither of us have slept in forty hours, but if you'll name the spot where we are to begin, I'll follow you."

"But—but, Bill, dammit all to glory ——"

"You're young and full of ginger," cut in Mandell quietly. "You should have married and settled down somewhere in a nice little cottage on the outskirts of an Army post. But, see here, we must first find a place to start on this thing. An opening must be made. There is yet not a clue except this one thing, Andy!" He held up his finger. *"Who wants to start war between the United States and Japan and just who will it benefit the most?* That's the big question, Andy. It is the only question. It is the one we will have to get to before we can go ahead with the work. This case is not worrying me, Andy."

"But—but we're not getting anywhere!"

"We're thinking, Andy. We're drawing conclusions and making deductions. As many cases in this business are solved at a desk as they are out probing about. No man is wasting time when he gives earnest and careful thought to the problem ahead of him. And now, young fire-ball, if you will kindly hand me another glass of water—like a good fellow, Andy!—I will have another shot of Doctor Cornmalt's rheumatic cure, and then we'll go down to that one-eyed Greek's joint on Market Street. I'm a little hungry, Andy. For a snack I think I'll have a couple of bottles of beer, a couple of fat dill-pickles, a cup of coffee, a platter of stew tripe ——"

"Yes, oh, yes!" cut in Lee. "I know. All that, with a few of those high-powered cocktails they serve down there, then a Welsh rarebit, maybe some pig knuckles and sauerkraut, all topped off most gloriously with cream pie and a banana-split. I know how you eat."

"At times," Mandell closed one eye, screwed the left side of his mouth upward and turned his head to one side as he downed a half-glass of Bourbon, "you have downright brilliant ideas, Andy. At times, yes, sir, at times you do!"

A few moments later, wheezing a trifle as he propelled his elephantine figure forward, one of the largest and most successful operatives of the United

States Secret Service was leading the way to the door. All the nations of the earth might go to war, the stars could fall and the heavens rain fire, but William Lazarus Mandell would allow himself to grow excited—never!

CHAPTER III

A SKELETON GRINS

SATURDAY passed with an outward calm over San Francisco, though the wireless and cables were still burning with speculation. Tokyo was still demanding. Washington was patient. When Sunday came, Tokyo and Washington rested.

Then Monday. The morning broke with a storm hovering over the Pacific Ocean. Dark, low-scudding clouds clung close to the sea. Wind rose and fell, driving in occasional sheets of rain. Then, at one o'clock in the afternoon, two Japanese cruisers came through the Golden Gate.

They came in quietly. The usual salutes were exchanged between them and the *Colorado* but the cruisers steamed on. They drifted to a halt five hundred yards apart and just off Angel Island. Their anchors were let go. They lay there sleepily and with but little activity aboard.

Then night settled. With it came a raging wind that was tearing across the ocean in fish-tailing blasts that wailed and bawled with the lament of thousands of dying cattle. The wind lifted the sea as if by the roots, whipping whishy walls of white water skyward and driving them before it in flying sheets. Mountainous combers kept rolling in, growing higher and higher as they neared the shore to break in a final lunge against the rock-bound spurs of headlands up and down the California Coast with the terrific splatter and reverberating thunder-clapping of massed batteries of heavy artillery.

"Yes, Andy!—Yes, my boy!—Just ten minutes more will make a new man out of this poor old bag of skin and bones."

Morning had come. The storm had passed, the wind and rain dying two hours before dawn. Belts of fog had crept in. Shadows of it still hung over the higher slopes of San Francisco like silvery veils.

Shaved and bathed, fully dressed and sitting on the side of his bed, Captain Lee had been trying to rouse old Eternity Bill Mandell for more than thirty minutes.

"Our orders are to go see Admiral Blunt this morning, Bill. It's nearly eight o'clock now."

There was no answer. Lee patted his toes on the floor impatiently, and sat there staring at the huge figure sprawled flat on its yard-wide back in the opposite bed. The massive chest was slow-heaving, rising and falling with deep, regular breathing. The face of it was a study. It was rough with a day's growth of beard as gray and stiff as a white boar's bristles. The mouth had slacked open like a yawning pocket, the big, loose lips limp. The dental plates for that mouth—with some of the teeth prettied with gold caps and crowns—were covered in water in the ice pitcher on the little table at the head of the bed.

Mandell's coat lay on the floor at the foot of the bed. His big shoes were on the window sill. His socks were still on his feet. His shiny old derby, his shirt, vest and trousers were hanging on the chandelier, the latter swinging by their red suspenders and looking large enough to cover the hind-quarters of a Percheron mare.

"Bill!"

Mandell had started to snore again. The sound was of a loose, baggy nature, not quite describable, but to Lee it was somewhat like an old woman trying to swallow a pill and gargle her throat at the same time.

"Bill!"

"Uh!"

"It's eight o'clock now!"

"Yes, Andy. It was the same time at this time yesterday morning, my boy."

In a moment he was snoring again. Knowing that the inevitable would have to come, Lee got up and entered the bathroom. He dipped a big, coarse bath-towel in a bowl of icy water, and shook it out. Without further ceremony, he walked back to Mandell's bed. He pulled down the covering, and spread the wet towel on Mandell's bare chest.

Mandell quivered. He was like a mountain of jelly-fat beginning to stir with the first tremors of an earthquake. The tremors changed to a violent spasm of shaking. The wide mouth sucked itself full of air, held it for a split-second, and expelled it with a loud *puh-shush!* Trembling and muttering, Mandell sat up. He flung the towel to the floor, and started rubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands.

"You will never make a detective, Andy," he declared, solemnly. "You take life entirely too seriously, my boy."

"Get out of that bed!" ordered Lee, sternly. "We are to go see Admiral Blunt this morning."

"Blunt?" Mandell yawned. "Oh, yes, Andy. That telegram that came in about four said something about it. My Gawd," he yawned again and stretched his arms, "don't they ever sleep in Washington! Must have added on a couple more cavalry officers back there."

"Get up. Let's get out of here."

"I'm not holding you, Andy, my boy."

"If I left you here you would sleep the clock twice around."

"Oh, well, there'd be a lot of satisfaction in it." Mandell yawned and stretched again. "Have you ordered up breakfast yet, Andy? No? Well, you're just the type who wouldn't. Do it while I bathe and shave. I'll take the usual pot of coffee, a stack of wheats, a glass of orange juice, double size, a couple of eggs, both sides cooked, a nice, thick slice of ham, a few French fried spuds, and —— Oh, I suppose that will do for now. I'm not feeling very well this morning, Andy. Getting old, my boy, getting old."

With that he rolled out of bed. He sat there yawning and scratching himself. Lee went to the telephone to order the breakfast.

"Ask 'em," suddenly put in Mandell, "if they happen to have a nice, big, thick and juicy piece of rhubarb pie!"

Then he got up and headed for the bathroom with long, surprisingly quick strides. But it was ten o'clock the next morning before they went aboard the *Colorado* in one of the ship's launches boarded near the Ferry Building.

Much had happened during the night. The streets were filled with extras. Newsboys seemed to be trying to bay the walls of the buildings down when Lee and Mandell reached the street. The headlines were big, bold and black. At every hand they read:

ADMIRAL TAKEMURA SLAIN!

Disappeared From Hotel Last Night at Eight
o'Clock—His Skeleton Found This Morning—
Most Gruesome Murder in the History
of the City

"Don't get excited, Andy, don't get excited," warned Mandell as they walked on up the street. "It's all in the day's grind of the corn. Each little incident leads to another. Incidents pile up in this game. There's nothing so terrible about it. Anybody with a streak of imagination and common horse sense can be a detective and produce results if he follows his leads. And incidents are always leads. The case is slowly but surely giving itself away."

They found the Federal Building swarming with more Secret Service men just in from Washington. Mandell ignored the most of them. He wheezed on to his own private office, looked over additional telegrams, threw the most of them in the waste-basket, and took a drink.

"Now," he grinned at Lee, "we'll go down to Police Headquarters and pay our respects. No use in going to the hotel where Takajoker or whatever his name was, disappeared. The police have seen to that and properly mussed it up. Which is usual and expected, Andy. Besides, the police would only sneer. There's a lot of jealousy in the detective game. Too much of it. Shameful, but it can't be helped. All I want you to do is to not get excited, my boy. It's not good for you. Liable to bring on high blood pressure before your time."

Down at Headquarters they found everything in a muddle with excitement. Admiral Takemura's skeleton had been found at dawn, fully dressed and leaning nonchalantly against a lamp-post in the fog settled about the corners of Jones and California streets on Russian Hill. The bones had been expertly drilled and wired together. Thin strips of steel had reinforced them, making them rigid enough to stand in almost any position one cared to place the skeleton.

The usual cigar—a thin, needle-like Havana with a half-inch of white ash on its tip—had been between the gold-capped teeth. His gloves were in the bare bones of his right hand. On the ring bones of his left hand was his old-fashioned dragon signet. His diamond stud was in the bosom of his shirt, and in his pockets were his personal papers, his money, a stubby fountain pen with his name in Japanese on it, and a big gold watch presented to him years before by one of the largest banking concerns in Tokyo for his heroic handling of a light-armored cruiser in the victorious battle with the Russian Fleet in the Sea of Japan.

With that cigar gripped so jauntily between his teeth, Admiral Takemura had looked like some gay-dog of a ghost from a graveyard who had been out making a night of it and, tired from his long prowl, had stopped to rest there against the lamp-post where dawn had overtaken him with his leering grin and the empty holes of his skull looking down over an awakening city.

The police had raised the usual storm. They had charged Russian Hill in their high-powered cars and with their cut-outs half open. They awoke the neighborhood with their noise; they drew the usual crowd of gawking and staring humanity. This one and that one of the crowd had had a suggestion to make or a breath of suspicion to whisper in the ear of any officer willing to listen.

Local newspaper reporters and press representatives had entered it from the beginning. The story had been red-hot, something to be handled in a hurry. Cameras had clicked while the police shoved and bawled at the crowd, half of which had been fighting as eagerly for a place in the pictures as the detectives themselves. In rapid-fire order, extras had soon appeared on the streets and newsboys had had the city roaring from the Ferry Building to the otherwise sober quiet of St. Francis Wood, while the wireless and cables were hot-footing the story to the rest of the world.

Dr. Rodin Lafferty, the police surgeon, had taken charge of the skeleton. A tall, sharp-faced individual of sixty, wearing gray tweeds and a soft gray fedora, he had literally withered the crowd about the lamp-post with his inky, deep-set eyes and enormous horn rims. With a few sharp, barked-out words, he had opened a lane through the crowd for the shiny black morgue wagon. He had been a man bristling with efficiency and the air of some wonder-working wizard and of the type who *came, saw, got,* and departed, leaving the crowd standing there still gawking and the police free to sleuth, bombard and browbeat the neighborhood with the usual questions. Within an hour after the morgue wagon had left Russian Hill, Dr. Lafferty had announced that his bulletin was ready.

Robbed of its many technical and tongue-twisting terms, the bulletin stated that the skeleton had been positively identified——"by bridgework, fillings of the teeth and other means of identification in the hands of this department"—as the bones of the late "Admiral Isota Takemura, a native of Japan." As to the manner of the death of the deceased, much had been left to the speculation and imagination of an alarmed and curious world. A number of bones about the torso and head had been broken, "as if crushed in the powerful embrace of some wild animal or monster." Strange, bill-like markings, large and small, had been left on the bones, indicating that the flesh had been devoured. Later the skeleton, "Undoubtedly, as our tests have shown," was given an acid bath to clean them of all tissue, and "followed by a bath of soap and water," and, still later, "baked dry of all moisture in an oven, furnace or other contrivance unknown at the present to this department. . . ."

It made corking headlines. Newspapers put out another run of extras. Not in years had there been such a story—certainly there had never been one to so thoroughly inflame the imagination of the world.

The inquest, with Mr. Y. Takahasha, his staff and a number of officers from the two cruisers in the harbor attending, had proved only a dismal failure, failing to produce a thing in the way of evidence or a single clue, though the Chief of Police, a good politician and capable of soothing the alarmed, made numerous promises of an immediate solution of the crime.

It had been merry hell, but nobody, it seemed, had the slightest idea as to who had killed Admiral Isota Takemura and played the ghastly joke on the world by leaning his frame against the lamp-post up there on Russian Hill.

"What do you make of it, Bill?" demanded Captain Lee late that Tuesday night when they were back in their office after a long day's grind of futile investigation. "It doesn't look like a white man's job to me."

"You are beginning to think, Andy," nodded old Eternity Bill. "We are slowly but surely driving toward a point. But don't let it worry you. Here, my boy!" He tossed a thick sheaf of telegrams across the desk. "You'd better answer those. I'll answer this second batch. Suppose you write 'So far nothing to report,' and I'll write 'Nothing so far to report,' and in the morning, if we don't forget, we'll have to take a run out in the bay and see Blunt."

CHAPTER IV

THE GIRL IN GREEN

WEDNESDAY morning came with a soft, balmy wind and a bright sun. Newspapers carried stories of more rioting. A number had been wounded in Tokyo charging the American embassy. San Francisco had quelled her mobs. Los Angeles had had one outbreak that had been ended by the police with a few heads cracked with nightsticks. New York had had the worst with Japanese and the city's ever-overburdened gangs of radical labor leaders gathering in Union Square with bewhiskered and unwashed Europeans leading the demonstrations. There had been street fighting. Windows had been smashed, clubs had clattered, tear-gas had rained, and there were seventy or eighty of the ring-leaders either in jail or the hospitals for free medical attention.

It worried Old Eternity Bill Mandell no more than one of his usual, heaping teaspoonfuls of bicarbonate of soda for his indigestion. He was talking to Captain Lee of anything and everything but the trouble at hand as he sat in the big launch going out to the *Colorado.*

"Everything has its own little splurge of excitement," he had told Lee as they were having breakfast in their room. "A murder, a suicide, a bank robbery. In two months, Andy, my boy, you'll have forgotten that all this happened."

But there was much activity aboard the *Colorado.* Captains' barges from the two Japanese cruisers lay alongside, their crews waiting in sullen silence. A captain of Marines stopped long enough to shake hands with Mandell as he wheezed down the deck. When Mandell and Lee arrived at the admiral's cabin two Marines barred the way until the Marine captain returned. They were shown into a smaller cabin then, and told to wait.

Beyond a passageway voices were making themselves known, one of them heavy and hoarse like the subdued bellowing of a bull about to charge. The others were sharp, harsh with accent. Any man who had ever heard Vice-Admiral Beauregard Blunt's voice would have recognized it immediately.

"I tell you," he was bull-bellowing, "that the affair rests with Washington and Tokyo! Solely with Washington and Tokyo! Because you men happen to be the captains of a couple of jerk-water cruisers, it doesn't signify a damned thing. I've explained the situation until I am getting hoarse. Keep your shirttails down, I tell you. You have no more authority in this thing than I have."

"We are here to inform you that we at all times have the authority to protect the interest, the lives and the property of our people!" The speaker's voice was harsh, coming in an abrupt, half-disconnected manner. "Of that authority I have so informed you, sir, and we but await the pleasure of your answer."

"It is not our wish," put in another voice, "to take the responsibility of direct action ——"

"And by 'direct' action, mister," cut in Blunt, "is that another hint that you might take it into your thick heads to shell the city?"

"We have made no threat to shell the city, sir!"

"Not in as many words, no!" snapped Blunt. "But it doesn't take more than hog-sense to understand your half-veiled threats! Now you fellows listen to me. I'll rattle it off to you in a white man's style. You're not bluffing a population of scared Chinks this morning. You're talking to Blunt—B-L-U-N-T, by God, vice-admiral of the United States Navy. Get this straight. I'll stand for no more threats!" There was a *boom-boom-bang!* of his big fist pounding his desk. "You men can start war with the United States in five minutes after you get back to your cruisers. One shot will do the trick. One shot from a three-inch or a six-inch gun! Throw just one shell over San Francisco, Oakland, Sausalito or even Tiburon, mister, and try to scare somebody. Right there and then you'll get a broadside hung in your bellies from this ship!"

"Are you daring to threaten us?" barked a third voice.

"Hell, no, I'm not threatening you!" raged Blunt. "I'm simply telling you to start something. When you do, there and then I'll blow both your piles of tin out of the water and clear to the top of Angel Island!"

"I consider that an insult to my country!"

"Well, why in hell don't you do something about it?" bellowed Blunt. "Don't keep standing there trying to scare me. You," he evidently turned to one of his officers then, "can show them the side. There will be no further formalities for the present, not even to the bo'son piping them over the side. And that," he apparently swung back to his callers, "will be all for this morning."

"We assure you that you will hear from Tokyo!" snapped a voice.

"I bid you good-day," growled Blunt.

Led by a stiff-backed American Lieutenant-commander, a half dozen Japanese officers were leaving the cabin a few moments later. Mandell and Lee waited patiently for another fifteen minutes. Blunt's voice was lifting and falling, at one moment angrily, at another softly. He laughed once. He was alone, sitting there at his desk when Mandell and Lee were finally admitted to the main cabin.

"Goliath, himself!" Blunt's sour face broke into a wide smile. He stood up quickly, shaking hands with Mandell. "How's the pussy-foot business, Goliath? By jingo, I believe you get fatter and fatter every day you live!"

"I'm losing a little," chuckled Mandell. "Appetite's a little slack these days. Getting old, admiral, getting old. I want you to meet Captain Andrew Lee, on leave with the service from the cavalry."

"Glad to know you!" Blunt's big hand closed like a big paw on Lee's. "Army man, eh?"

"Army, yes, sir!" smiled Lee. "You probably wish you were in the Army right now instead of having to meet Japanese delegations."

"No, no Army for me." Blunt was waving them to chairs as he spoke. "Once the Navy, always the Navy. I once had a very close friend by the name of Lee. Hailed from the South. Died twenty-odd years ago in command of the *Oregon.* Name was Charles E. Lee. For a sobriquet, his men called him Hell-On-Wheels Charley."

"He was my father," smiled Lee.

"Your father!" Blunt had slammed himself back in his chair. He stood up again. "Your father! And—and a Navy man's son in the Army! Well, I'll be damned!"

"Well," grinned Lee, "the Army does give the Navy a trimming in football ——"

"Hanged if it doesn't!" Blunt laughed loudly now. "And, of course, the Army still looks at the Navy as the boys who operate the ferry-boats that carry them rations to fight on. Sit down." He banged back in his chair. "It's good to see you both. I was shipmates with Charley Lee at the battle of Manila Bay and the scrap we had at Santiago. Wonderful fellow. Splendid! But sit down. Again I must tell you I am glad to see you. Hell's delight, I need somebody I can relax with. What's new Goliath?"

"Little that you don't already know." Mandell pulled up a chair. Lee sat down in one at the end of the desk. "Really, I suspect that you know more than we. My orders from the gentlemen in Washington were to come to see you."

"What for?"

"Oh, coöperation, I suppose, admiral, coöperation." He glanced about the cabin. "You don't happen to have a little drink handy?"

"Ever see a battleship that didn't have several dozen or so?" grinned Blunt. "Or a destroyer, a sub or even the admiral's barge? What'll you gents have?"

"I take most anything," chuckled Mandell. "Bourbon's the favorite, but I can drink the line from Chinese *ng ka py* to *mui kew lu* or even a pinch of Japanese *saki* now and then. Andy, here, clings mostly to water with an occasional shot of rum or gin."

"Well, I've got no *saki* and the other stuff you mention," frowned Blunt. He turned and touched a push-button in the bulkhead. "Let's make it Bourbon and ginger ale. I'm fairly good at that."

One of the Filipino stewards brought the bottles, the glasses and a bowl of cracked ice. Blunt had poured a round of drinks when the Lieutenant-Commander reappeared.

"Sorry, sir, to trouble you," he touched his cap respectfully, "but one of those Japs gave me a message for you as they went over the side."

"Well, what was it?"

"He told me," smiled the officer, "to quote him to the letter, 'it is my desire that you remind your most honorable admiral of the story of the Pied Piper!' "

"And what in hell did he mean by that?" growled Blunt.

"Don't know, sir," the officer shrugged and smiled. "He probably intended you to take it as a threat against our people who happen to be in Japan."

"Well," Blunt scratched his head, "I didn't send them over there. No matter, anyway. If any more callers come aboard you may inform them that the admiral is busy, very busy!"

Blunt waved him away once more and gave his attention to his callers and the bottles and the glasses. In a few minutes they were discussing the death of Admiral Takemura.

"I can't help you, Goliath." Blunt was slowly turning his glass between his finger and thumb.

"Didn't expect you to, admiral, didn't expect you to," smiled Mandell. "The police, of course, have bungled the job of Admiral Take-a-something's getting bumped off. The room in the hotel, for instance, should never have been touched. Those making their investigations should have left everything lying right where it was in the beginning. Often you can pick up a clue after everybody has come and gone, providing those who came and left had the forethought to not touch anything. You can look at a wall, you know, without tearing it down ——"

"Well enough, but where do I come in?" frowned Blunt.

"It's rather a delicate subject, once we get down to it." Old Eternity Bill Mandell squared himself in his chair. "It is known in Washington that you're a fireball, admiral. It is known, also, that we have been close friends for a number of years. My position now, if I can take the hint in the telegram that Washington intended me to take, is to impress upon you the necessity of holding your fire ——"

"I'm not firing upon anybody, Goliath!"

"No, admiral," chuckled Mandell, toying with his glass, "but you're a cocked gun. Our departments are about as far apart as Paris and San Francisco when it comes to the point of one telling the other what to do. They realize that back in Washington. Many other officers in the service would hold their hands and wait, but our department knows you, knows what you will do ——"

"I can't do anything!" snapped Blunt. "Hell, if the admiral of the Pacific Fleet hasn't got my hands tied ——"

"And Washington has his hands tied," cut in Mandell. "It's one little red string after another, though some people call it a tape. I simply want your coöperation, your indulgence. We're on the brink of something damned terrible, admiral, though I feel absolutely certain we'll play it out. I haven't made it so terrible to Andy, here, because he's young, ambitious, anxious to snatch something up by the heels and finish it or wring its neck. That's the cavalry in him, I suppose ——"

"Navy!" corrected Blunt with a grin, a Navy man first, last and always, and never willing to allow the Army an inch. "Got it from his father, old Hell-On-Wheels Charley!"

"Have it your way, admiral," laughed Lee, "but I will stick to my guns."

"You would!" nodded Blunt. "The Lees are noted for sticking to their guns."

Further conversation between them was halted by Lieutenant-Commander Davis reappearing. Again he touched his cap.

"Sorry to interrupt, sir," the flicker of a smile crossed his face, "but Miss Blunt is coming aboard."

"Eh, the devil you say!" Blunt stood up. "Now, what in hell does she want at this time of day?"

"Not knowing, I can't say, sir." The half-smile was still at the corners of the officer's mouth. "Shall I show her in?"

"You won't have to," growled Blunt. "She'll bust in. Well!" He picked up his glass, emptying it quickly. Then he tossed the glass in the waste-basket. "Not supposed to drink when my daughter is around, gentlemen. No!" He held up his hand as Lee made a quick move as if to dispose of his glass. "She's nobody's pinky-panky as old Goliath here knows. I'm supposed to be on a diet. Blood pressure's up a notch or two."

The girl appeared a few minutes later. She was twenty-one or two, a tall girl, very fair, immeasurably, almost shockingly pretty. Her hair was dark, with the faintest pinch of gold in it. Her leather coat was green, like the tiny, green leather turban. A brighter green scarf was at her soft white throat. Her eyes were large and strikingly luminous—and green. Green like soft, coolly sparkling gems to Captain Andrew Lee. She was like some gorgeous creature entering a scene on a stage with all the long-studied benefit of light and shadow specially arranged to make her coming the all-crowning achievement of the play. He stood up quickly. The Army asserted himself. His heels went together, shoulders squaring.

The girl went straight to Mandell, grasping his hands affectionately.

"Why, Uncle Willie!" she cried, her rich, clear laugh filling the cabin like suddenly stirring notes of chimes. "What a surprise to find you here! Why, it has been more than two years since I have seen your shining countenance!"

"Yes, Holly! Yes, my dear!" Mandell was like some old Shakespearean actor now. "How beautiful you are! But I warn you, now," he held up his right forefinger, still holding both her hands in his left, "don't you dare start telling me that I am looking more and more like the old grandpa gink pictured on a cake of tar soap."

"Very well, my dear Romeo!" she laughed. "But I was born at Christmas time and don't start reminding me that my paternal woe over there," she released one of her hands and pointed a neatly manicured thumb at the admiral, "had to look up at a sprig hanging from the chandelier to find a name for me! And now, my poor, forgotten man!" She was suddenly away from Mandell and rushing over to her father and throwing her arms around him.

"Good morning, Admiral Beauregard Blunt! Is the old pressure up or down?"

Captain Lee shifted from one foot to the other. Truly, he felt as if *he* was the forgotten man.

CHAPTER V

"TOOK!"

BUT it was not for long that Captain Lee was the "forgotten man." Blunt introduced them, excused himself most politely and at length for the oversight, and told Holly Blunt of Hell-On-Wheels Charley Lee.

Men and women of the Service—Army, Navy or Marines—drop formalities quickly. In a few minutes they were conversing freely—and with any feelings of new acquaintance forever discarded.

"I came aboard to remind his royal highness, the admiral," Holly Blunt was soon laughing, "of an engagement for tonight at nine. I expect your kindest and most pitying indulgence, Captain Lee. I know my ground. I have been in this position many times before. I expect a most glorious row."

"But—but," a growl was already coming into Blunt's voice, "I know of no engagement!"

"The admiral never does!" said the girl, her gem-green eyes sparkling as she turned to face the cold, sea-blue eyes at the opposite side of the desk. "Sir," she stiffened her back, right hand rising to a perfect salute, "may I have the pleasure of informing you that the Blunt family—father, mother and daughter—are to appear, in person and not by last-minute messages of regret, at a formal dinner at the Saint Francis Hotel, given, as Dame Rumor has it, for the purpose of announcing the engagement of a certain Miss Aretta Riley, daughter of one Captain Alonzo B. Riley, U. S. N., who ——"

"Oh, hell, that!" frowned Blunt. "Can't make it! Impossible, absolutely! No use in a hell of a row, now Holly. It's a case of ——"

" 'Business before pleasure, my dear!' " finished the girl. "I know the rest of it—'Expected orders from the admiral of the fleet!' — 'Buried to the eyes with my reports so-and-so!' — 'Doctor's orders to keep off my feet for a day or two!' — and, oh, yes," she was trying to finish hurriedly, "that one about ——"

"My God," growled Blunt, looking longingly at the waste-basket, "cut it short, Holly, cut it short!"

"You are a dear, admiral!" She was around the desk quickly, kissing him. "So sweet of you ——"

"Get out!" thundered Blunt, pushing her away. "I'm *not* going! I tell you, Holly, that ——"

"Oh, yes, admiral, here it is!" She had stooped quickly, picking up his glass from the waste-basket. "I knew I would find it."

She rinsed out the glass with ginger ale, filled it with cracked ice, and mixed a stout drink. He sat there looking at her amazedly.

"Here, admiral," she smiled, setting the glass in front of him. "You are so sweet, *so sweet!* but you are a naughty little admiral," she pointed her finger close at his nose, "to always be tossing your glasses in the waste-basket. Why, I had a better opinion of a real, manly-chested vice-admiral of the Pacific Fleet!"

"Well—*oh, well!*" said Blunt, hopelessly, reaching for his drink. "Mankind was ruined by a woman named Eve too early in the beginning for me to save it."

And Old Eternity Bill Mandell and Captain Lee roared with laughter.

* * * *

Timid people never make fighting men. Therefore, the Army and Navy press issues rapidly. It is traditional in any man's country. The philosophy is a simple one, clicked with glasses around the world.—*Live While We May, for We Who Live Today May Tomorrow Die!*

Captain Lee and Holly Blunt sat beside each other at a most delightful luncheon aboard. At one-thirty they left the admiral and Old Eternity Bill behind to follow them later in the day. Lee and Holly rode to the shore—just the two of them—in the little, brass-gadgeted cabin of the admiral's barge.

The sun was shining. The sky was blue. Neither Lee nor Holly were even conscious of the two Japanese cruisers lying hard and ugly-gray against the emerald-green winter coat of Angel Island. To Lee, Washington and Old Eternity Bill Mandell were so far, *far* away that they never existed. Only the cavalry—only the thundering romances of hooves, the *clank* of sabers and accouterments, and a little bungalow nestling somewhere in the sun with perpetual roses growing around the door—held him.

"Your eyes are green," he told her. "Green! A magnificent green! I have never seen a pair like them! And your name is Holly, and holly is green. Green like your eyes! Please, Holly, may I call you *Holly?*"

"Yes, Captain ——"

"Andy!" he corrected. "Just *Andy* ——"

"In private, perhaps," she nodded, "but you know the Service. Always climbing, the title always changing. Goliath said you were only on leave from the Army to the Secret Service because of your work here and there. One of those Washington arrangements, I suppose. No matter. Some day you will go back—to the Army. Then it will be 'Major' Lee, then 'Colonel' Lee, then, I hope, 'General' Lee. Sounds beautiful, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Holly! But—but you are so beautiful ——"

"Not a bad-looking fellow yourself, Andy!"

"Oh, hell! I'm *serious,* Holly!"

"Well?"

"I mean it, Holly!" he seized her hands. "Honest, I do!"

"Hell-On-Wheels Charley!" she smiled. "They say he was a fast one, Andy."

"Don't you believe me, Holly?"

"Oh, of course I do, Andy! When I first looked at you, I said to myself, 'Glory be, what a handsome, droll fellow!' "

"Holly!"

"Yes, Andy?"

"Are you *never* serious a moment?"

"Yes, Andy, you poor, too-serious *gal-loot!* If you must know—honestly, truly and no foolin'—I have always liked the cavalry."

"Holly!"

Silence, the motor *chug-chug*-ing. A minute passed, then two—three. There was a gasp, a long-drawn sigh.

"Why, Andy, you've kissed the admiral's daughter!"

* * * *

When they arrived at the Navy landing pier, Lee ignored the two big-chested sailors who offered their arms to help Holly ashore. The honor belonged to the Army. The Army needed no help. With Lee still holding her arm, they walked up Market Street. They had lunch again, though it had scarcely been an hour since they had finished a most splendid meal aboard the *Colorado*. A nice, cozy little café, just off Market and Pine, had appealed to them. It was almost five o'clock when they again emerged on the streets.

The Army and Navy spirit was working over-time. Washington, sunken Japanese steamers, and the skeleton of Admiral Isota Takemura were still farther and farther away—almost completely forgotten.

A California Street cable-car promised a slower means of travel to Russian Hill. They boarded it. They got off at Jones and California, right where Admiral Takemura's jaunty skeleton had been found —and they never realized it. They walked on slowly, just like a young man and a girl will with plenty of time to spare.

It was well after six when the Army kissed the Navy good-bye in the hallway of Admiral Blunt's old brown-stone. It was almost seven when Lee returned to the private office in the Federal Building and found Old Eternity Bill Mandell, who had arrived less than ten minutes before, sitting behind the desk.

"More telegrams, Andy, more telegrams," groaned Mandell. "This time you'd better write, 'Nothing so far to report'—and I'll write, this time, 'So far nothing to report.' It should be good for four or five days yet."

"Did the admiral come ashore with you?"

"What else could he do?" chuckled Old Eternity Bill, taking a tiny pen-knife out of his vest-pocket to begin sharpening a new pencil he had just removed from the middle-drawer of his desk. "Blunt can cuss out and shout down seventeen Japanese cruiser commanders, but Holly, with half the time, can make him eat hay like a horse."

They were very busy when the telephone rang at eight-thirty. Mandell answered it. Admiral Beauregard Blunt was on the other end of the line. His voice was high, bellowing out of the receiver in a tone loud enough to be heard at the opposite side of the room.

"What?" bawled Old Eternity Bill into the transmitter. "Whatinhell are you saying, admiral?"

"Gone!" howled the receiver.

"Gone?" Old Eternity Bill's voice was like a wail. "My Gawd, man, what are you saying!"

"Holly's gone!" crackled the receiver. "Her mother was black-jacked right here in the house!"

"And—and Holly's kidnapped?"

"Hell, no!" bellowed the receiver. *"Took!* Just *took!* Bodily took! Out of the house! Two damned, slant-eyed Japs! I'm afraid that it's another one of those Admiral Takemura things!"

"Gawd A'mighty!" groaned Mandell. "Whatever you do, man, don't call the police. We're coming up there right now!"

CHAPTER VI

"THE PIED PIPER!"

"DON'T get excited, Andy, my boy, don't get excited! It never pays in this business."

But Captain Andrew Lee was in a hurry. He could have picked up the elephantine Old Eternity Bill Mandell and dashed down the hall to the elevators with him. But he knew that Mandell was right. The Federal Building was, as Mandell had described it several times, "lousy with newspaper men." Sharp-eyed men they were, always watching, always on the look-out for news. Four of them tried to button-hole Mandell and Lee when they reached the main floor.

"So far nothing to report," Mandell told them. "Nothing so far!"

"But," insisted a tall, dark man who looked like some foreign press representative, "is there yet no clue to the murder or murderers of Admiral Takemura?"

"We haven't yet said there wasn't a clue," parried Mandell, patiently plodding along toward the revolving doors.

"Then—then," note-books popped out, "there are clues?"

"There are always clues, mister."

"The murderer or murderers, then, are known?" The dark man was getting excited.

"Sure!" nodded Old Eternity Bill. "The men who did the murder know each other, I suppose."

"Are you leaving the building now to make some investigation?" insisted a short, blue-eyed little reporter with a mop of straw-colored hair.

"We are!" declared Old Eternity Bill. "We are on our way to a dinner engagement. I am hoping that the food will be good and plentiful."

"You're a *fine* detective!" sneered the dark man.

"Sure!" chuckled Old Eternity Bill, barging on into the revolving doors. "One of the best in the business, my boy, one of the best in the business."

They reached the street. The newspaper men followed them for almost a block. Rounding a corner, they were finally rid of them. With a glance behind, they bounced into a taxicab.

"Bully!" wheezed Mandell as he settled back in the seat and the cab whirled away from the curb. "We gave them the slip, Andy!"

Captain Lee made no answer. He was all needles and pins, sitting there on the edge of the seat.

"You have to watch newspaper men," Mandell puttered on loosely. "They're hell for the news, hit or miss, and often give you your worst belly-aches.

Back in Chicago, once—oh, I'd say about thirty years ago, Andy, I remember a case ——"

"Listen, *God damn you!"* Lee had suddenly whirled to him with typical cavalry officer fury, "can't you keep that hell-fired big mouth of yours closed for five seconds! I don't give a tinker's *dam* about what happened in Chicago thirty or forty years ago! I ——"

"Why, Andy!" groaned Mandell. "Andy, my boy ——"

"Shut up!"

"But, Andy, you're excited, my boy. You're not drilling a troop of cavalry now. Hell, Andy, you're a detective!"

They reached Russian Hill with Lee still on the edge of the seat. Lee was the first out of the cab, leaving Mandell to settle with the driver. He dashed up the steps, and rang the bell. Admiral Blunt opened the door. He looked like he had aged ten years in only a few hours.

"I remembered what old Goliath said today about not disturbing things," he explained. "Dr. Steele, from just next door, is attending Mrs. Blunt in her bedroom. She was severely beaten about the head, face and shoulders."

Mandell came in then, wheezing a little.

"Tell the doctor not to leave, admiral," he ordered. "You are, I presume, well-acquainted with him?"

"For many years, yes."

"Very good. Now, just don't get excited. I want you to tell us just what happened. No hurry about it, admiral."

Blunt showed them into the library, a high-ceiled, dark-wooded room with the walls lined with books. They sat down in sturdy, black-leathered chairs at a long table.

Lee was still on needles and pins. Everything seemed so ungodly slow, so deliberate. He could have shot Old Eternity Bill on the spot.

"There is little to tell you," the admiral began. "I came in thirty or forty minutes ago. Mrs. Blunt was lying in the living room with her head on the hearth and her face covered with blood. I immediately called Steele, then you. I started looking then for our house-boy, Wu Fong Sam. He is in the basement, bound and gagged, and tied to the main drain-pipe. He had blood on his face ——"

"You didn't release him, admiral?"

"No. I haven't even touched him ——"

"Splendid!" nodded Mandell. "I wish everybody had your forethought in such things. But go ahead."

"Mrs. Blunt was conscious. She has told me that she had gone to her room to bathe, leaving Holly in the living room by the bay window with a book. Wu Fong Sam was in the kitchen making a cup of chocolate for Holly. Mrs. Blunt came back in the room just a few minutes later ——"

"Had she taken her bath?"

"No." Blunt was rubbing his chin. "She had had just time enough to draw her bath. The tub fills rather slowly. You know these old houses and their plumbing. Been intending to change all of it. Anyway, Mrs. Blunt came back in the living room. She was in her bathrobe ——"

"Pardon me," cut in Old Eternity, "but you have another servant, also, don't you?"

"A Swedish girl, yes," nodded Blunt with a frown of impatience. "She is away, in the hospital with an infection in her right foot. Been there a couple of weeks ——"

"Know her well? That is, has she been with you long?"

"Three years. Splendid servant. Splendid cook. Swedes are. And Wu Fong Sam, before you ask about him, has been with us eight years. Got him in China when I was in Asiatic service. Good man—splendid ——"

"Very well, admiral, go on."

"When Mrs. Blunt entered the living room, she saw two men carrying Holly out of the room. The girl looked as limp as a rag, very pale ——"

"Struggling?"

"No! Just limp. Surely unconscious. Mrs. Blunt screamed. The men dropped Holly and rushed at her. They began beating her with what she describes as 'short, black, snake-like things.' Black-jacks. Of course, she was unconscious in a few moments. The rest—well," he shrugged, "I guess I know as much about it as Mrs. Blunt. She said the men looked like Japs. I am reminded, too, of what one of those Jap cruiser captains said when he told Lieutenant-Commander Davis to remind me of that old yarn about the Pied Piper. I remember something of the yarn, something about the piper driving rats out of a town, the mayor refusing him his pay, and the piper taking the town's children. Why—why, Goliath," his eyes widened and he was suddenly bouncing to his feet, "it—it can be that very thing! *The Pied Piper!* By God, man ——"

"Keep your shirt-tail down, admiral, keep your shirt-tail down," ordered Old Eternity, gently. "It never pays to get excited."

CHAPTER VII

LITTLE DROPS OF WATER

CHECK! Verify! Everything was check and verify with Old Eternity Bill Mandell and Captain Andrew Lee. They went into Mrs. Blunt's bedroom. She was a slender woman with dark hair and her daughter's striking, luminous-green eyes—a handsome woman of fifty-odd. Dr. Steele sat at the head of the bed, a tall, thin man with a ruddy face, penetrating gray eyes and a professional beard.

"There were three lacerations on the face," the doctor explained. "I found the evidence of four blows on the top and back of the head, but the scalp has not been broken. The wounds are not serious, gentlemen, but I have given her a powder for her nerves. She has had a very unfortunate shock, of course, and I trust that you will use discretion."

"Yes, doctor, yes, sir," bowed Mandell. "You, sir, if you please, will join Admiral Blunt in the library. Please do not leave the house for a little while. I am certain that we are going to need your assistance very shortly."

With the doctor out of the room, Mandell questioned Mrs. Blunt for a few minutes. She was almost amazingly calm, but there was little that she could tell that Admiral Blunt had not already told them.

"Very well, Mrs. Blunt." Mandell patted one of her smooth, diamond-ringed hands tenderly. "You must rest now."

"I am resting, thank you." The woman smiled faintly. "We of the Service, you know, sometimes have to pocket our pains and fears. I am lying here," she sighed deeply, "and telling myself over and over that this thing has not happened, that I am only dreaming. I was a very young bride when my husband was fighting at Santiago, and Manila. News traveled slowly in those days. It was especially long in coming from Manila. My husband had been twice reported killed in action. Each time I told myself, 'I am only dreaming.' You learn to do that in the Service, Mr. Mandell."

"A wonderful accomplishment, my dear," sympathized Old Eternity. "But you must do something for me now. I must ask you to tell a little lie. The police will have to be notified. With them will come the reporters. Please, for the present, do not tell them that the men you saw looked like Japanese. It is better for now to even say that you were struck from behind. Anything but something that will further inflame the country and the press."

"I will do anything I possibly can to help you," she answered firmly. "I have great faith in your ability, Mr. Mandell. But—but—*God!*" she sat up suddenly, catching his hands in her own. Her eyes had suddenly filled with tears. "Please——Oh, please!—big, lumbering old Goliath, don't, *don't* let the terrible thing that happened to the Japanese admiral come to my Holly!"

"There! there!" rumbled Mandell. "Don't you even start thinking such a thing. Lie back there on your pillow. Rest—and *dream*. Why, there's not a shadow of any such a danger as that, my dear!"

"I—I'm trying very, *very* hard to keep from going mad!"

"There's no danger of that, either," rumbled Mandell again. "Not a bit of it. There's too much of the old Service in you for such a thing."

He turned that yard-wide back to her then, and barged out of the room with Lee right behind him. Lee caught his arm when they were down the hall.

"Look here, have you forgotten that Chink gagged and bound like a trussed bird in the basement?"

"Not for a second, Andy, not for a second, my boy. Just for now he's right where I want 'im."

They went into the living room. It was brilliant with light. Like hounds sniffing for the scent of a trail, they started going over the room. In the bay window sat Holly's chair. At its right lay a copy of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* in a soft, red leather binding. On the rug beside it was something else that caught Mandell's old eyes. It was a tiny, dull-gold thing like a class-pin. Mandell picked it up with a tiny pair of tweezers, and looked at it closely.

"Sort of a veteran's pin," he grunted. "Japanese fraternity for those who fought in the war with Russia. Take it to the admiral. Ask him if he has ever seen it."

Lee was back in a few minutes. Old Eternity smiled.

"Never saw it, eh!" He almost chuckled as he carefully pocketed the pin. "Well, we're ploughing the corn an' 'taters, as we used to say down on the farm, only I don't want the police or the newspapers to get hold of this thing."

"In other words," nodded Lee, "it was deliberately left here for us to find?"

"Andy, my boy," Mandell looked up from his knees on the rug, "you are developing rapidly. Only," he dropped back to his elbows, more hound-like than ever now, "I still say you should have kept that good job in the Army."

He examined Holly's chocolate cup without touching it. A half-spoonful of chocolate had been left in it. Mandell lifted the cup with his tweezers. He chuckled. He sat back on his heels, and rubbed his belly. In the saucer in front of him were several little drops of water.

"That, Andy, my dear boy," he whispered, "gives us at least one of the men responsible for tonight's work ——"

"You mean ——"

"—— and tonight's work," Mandell was going right on speaking as if talking to himself, "is dovetailing right in with the sinking of a couple of Jap ships and the skeleton of a certain cocky fellow leaning against a lamp-post. Oh, by the way, Andy," he looked up suddenly, "let's take a look at our bird in the basement."

CHAPTER VIII

"MARK MY WORD!"

"DON'T rush, my boy, don't rush!" ordered Mandell as they started for the kitchen and a yellow door at the right of the stove that would open on the head of the basement stairs. "It never pays in the long-run. Keep cool, calm and collected."

A pound-cake sitting under a large, round glass cover caught his eyes. He walked over to it, whacked off a huge slice of it with a cake-knife, and started cramming it in his mouth.

"My God!" groaned Lee. "Bill, *couldn't* you let things like that wait in a time like this?"

"Physical stimulation, Andy," mumbled Mandell with his mouth full of cake. "A man must keep up his strength."

The lights were still burning in the basement, having been left on by Admiral Blunt. Lee hurried down the stairs. Beyond the furnace he saw the bound figure of Wu Fong Sam standing tied securely to two 4-inch black drains. Lee was examining the man closely when Mandell reached them.

Mandell was more thorough. He was actually painful in his thoroughness. He switched on his old, flask-like flash-light, and adjusted his glasses on his nose. Leaning so close he seemed to be trying to smell them, he started examining the Chinaman's ropes and the cotton rope gag in the man's mouth.

"Well done!" he grunted at last. "Let's take them off, Andy. Slip them. Don't cut them. Wu must be getting mighty tired standing here like this. Poor fellow! It's a terrible thing to have this happen to a man so nice and loyal as Wu."

Wearing blue serge trousers, a white coat and rubber-soled shoes, Wu Fong Sam was a typical houseboy. He was short and slender. His mouth was weak and narrow. His old-baby face was beginning to wrinkle and was almost as dark as that of the darkest Mongol. He tottered when the gag was removed and his ropes carefully slipped from his hands. Lee caught him to keep him from falling.

"Don't try to talk yet, Wu," ordered Mandell. "There's plenty of time, old fellow. Help him along, Andy, but don't touch anything in the kitchen or the living room on the way up."

Half-carrying the man up the stairs and through the kitchen, Lee deposited him in a big chair in the living room and well away from the bay window. Mandell plodded into the room three or four minutes later. He went to the bathroom, shuffling along like some old waiter with broken-down arches.

Returning with a tall glass of water for Wu Fong Sam, he called Captain Lee into the hall and spoke to him in a low voice.

"We'll have to call the police soon, Andy," he told Lee. "For courtesy's sake, if for nothing more. Let's speed up our part of it. I'll wash this up here and tell the Blunts what I want told to the police. You split the wind out of here. Lieutenant-Commander Davis is still aboard the *Colorado*. Get him. Go over to those Jap cruisers. See the officer who made that crack about the Pied Piper and told Davis to remind the admiral of the yarn. Find out just what he meant. How it happened that he did that. All about it, Andy. But handle it with kid gloves. Don't let the cavalry boil over in you and knock somebody's teeth out if they get fresh with you. Japs are a sneery bunch. You must remember that. They've sneered from one side of the world to the other. It's their one idea of how to put over a bluff. Let 'em keep it. It makes 'em feel good. Just get the dope, and meet me at the office when you're through. I'll get out of here as soon as I can. Before the police arrive, anyway. They'll have every newspaper man they can get to come banging in here with them. Never saw a confounded cop who wouldn't bust his belly-band to get his name in the papers. But clear out!" He waved his hands. "Do as I told you."

With Lee out of the way, he went back to the kitchen. He rummaged in the refrigerator, found three cold bottles of beer, a large slice of cheese, and three cold pig knuckles. He finished two bottles of the beer, the cheese and the knuckles. He whacked himself off another huge slice of cake. Munching the cake out of his left hand and sipping the third bottle of beer with his right, he went back into the living room.

"Now, Wu," he began, dragging up a chair and sitting down directly in front of the Chinaman, "let's have your story of to-night's monkey business. Start right at the beginning and go to the end of it. And don't be angry at the admiral," he held up his finger. "It was my orders, Wu, that you had to stay where you were. I wanted to find you exactly as you were left. Now go ahead. Tell me in your own way just what happened, and take all the time you like about it."

Wu Fong Sam's story was short and to the point. He had made "Missee Hollee clup chockey pretty soon quickee. Missee Hollee no likee blooey lound losee timee." He had brought her the chocolate, and had returned to the kitchen. Yes, he knew that her mother was going to take a bath. But he was busy in the kitchen until he heard a noise. Oh, not "biggee." Just a small noise. He had come back into the living room. There were three men in the room. Yes, three! There was no mistake of it. They had guns. Big, black guns. And, yes, they were Japanese. One of them struck him. With a soft, dark thing. He bent forward so that Mandell could feel of a lump on his head half the size of a small hen's egg. Everything had gone very "darkee, no see. Allee blackee." And had returned to consciousness in the basement tied to the drain-pipes.

"Ever see this before?" Mandell showed him the pin he had found on the rug. Wu leaned forward, looking at it closely. He sat back after a few moments, and shook his head.

"No see plin 'flore."

"Didn't think you had." Mandell carefully put the thing back in his pocket. "Now, Wu, you say they were Japanese? How do you know they were Japanese?"

"Me know Japanese!"

"Sure, I guess you would." Mandell nodded patiently. "How would you say that they got into the living room?"

"Maybe so slun plochee." Wu pointed toward a pair of French doors at the left of the fireplace. "Not muchee timee lockee."

"Oh, yes! Not often locked. And how would you say they left the room?"

"Blasement. Maybe so slun plochee. Me no suree."

"It was all dark—to you?"

"Yes. Blackee!"

"And you had made Miss Holly a cup of chocolate?"

"Yes!"

"One cup or two?"

"One."

"Had you washed up the pot or pan you made it in?"

"No!"

"Didn't touch the cup after you gave it to Miss Holly?" Mandell was studying his face. "That right, Wu?"

The Chinaman nodded.

"Where did you get the cup?"

"Dlish cabee!"

"How long had it been hanging in the dish cabinet? All day?"

"Allee dlay!"

"You're sure of that?"

Again the Chinaman nodded.

"Very good, Wu." Mandell eased back in his chair. "Did you wipe the cup with a cloth before you poured the chocolate in it?"

"Yes!"

"Cup was perfectly clean—and dry?"

"Yes!"

"Very well, Wu." Mandell rubbed his hands. "Now tell me, do you go out very much at night?"

"No!"

"Twice a week, maybe?"

"Maybe so, yes."

"Got a girl, Wu?"

"No girl."

"Maybe, Wu," Mandell smiled, "just one pretty little girl you go see now and then?"

"No girl."

"Well, maybe a nice, pretty little Japanese girl?"

"No!" Wu Fong Sam's lips twitched. "No Jap! Me China bloy!"

"Hum-mm, not much of ladies' man. Wu!" Mandell grinned. "I thought better than that of you. Well, all right." He stood up, and looked at his big, old-fashioned, yellow-gold watch.

"You go in the library, Wu. Tell the doctor in there to come in here. You stay with Admiral Blunt. You are a nice fellow. The Blunts like you very much. I am sorry we kept you in the basement so long, but we knew we could depend on you to not mind doing anything to help us. Now, run along and send in the doctor, Wu."

* * * *

Captain Lee returned to the Federal Building at three o'clock in the morning, and found him sitting there like a man-mountain behind the desk. Old Eternity Bill was just finishing the last of two extra-large club sandwiches, three fat dill pickles and a quart milk bottle of sweetened coffee.

Extras had been on the streets by midnight. The police had raised the usual police storm. Again they had charged Russian Hill. Local reporters and press representatives had questioned the Blunts like hounds baying on a new trail. Two of the papers carried the usual "grief-stricken mother" picture on their front pages, showing Mrs. Blunt propped on her pillows in bed. There were a string of Admiral Blunt's pictures, and two of Holly's. Good copy! Splendid copy! It was the type of a story so dear to the hearts of newspapers.

"Well, Andy, my boy?" Mandell made a *whish-whish*-ey sound with his hands as he brushed the crumbs from them and downed the last of his coffee. "What of the Pied Piper business?"

"I got it all!" Lee dropped wearily in his chair. "Davis took me right to the captain I wanted to see. Very little trouble after I made things clear by telling the fellow just what had happened. Here it is: Early yesterday morning a vegetable and melon scow by the name of Little Naples, went alongside the cruisers. The owner of the scow, an Italian who lives in the Mission, had a letter addressed in Japanese—darned poor Japanese at that—to 'The commanders of the Japanese cruisers now in San Francisco Bay.' There it is." He tossed an opened letter on the desk. "Translated, it simply says, 'When you go aboard the American Warship, mention the story of the Pied Piper. It will get you more consideration from Admiral Blunt than anything you can possibly do.' The Japs simply fell for it, hook, line and sinker ——"

"Go on, Andy," nodded Mandell. "You checked the scow, I suppose?"

"Of course!" frowned Lee. "That was why I was gone so long. I found the scow near Fishermen's Wharf after searching the whole waterfront. Lucky I didn't wait for morning, for it's sailing at four o'clock for its owner's vegetable and melon gardens up the Sacramento River. He told me how he came in possession of the note. A man who looked like a Jap came to the wharf and gave him five dollars to deliver it and, also, told him he could sell some melons and vegetables to the cruisers, which he did. Of course, he doesn't know who the Jap-looking bird was ——"

"Naturally!" nodded Mandell again. "No particular matter just yet. You checked him, the scow bird?"

"Of course! so that we can have him later, when we want him."

"That's good, Andy." Mandell again brushed his hands. He stood up. "I am entirely satisfied. And now, Andy, we'll go down to the Greek's and get a slice of pie."

"But—but Holly?" Lee stood up suddenly. "Bill, this is hell! Why—why, she may be dead by now! Damn it, Bill, I ——"

"Andy, my boy," Mandell held up his hand, "forty years in the detective business teaches you many things. You get to a point where you depend on intuition as much as your right hand. Right at the present, something tells me Holly is perfectly safe. I've about convinced the Blunts of that. In the meanwhile, my boy, we will watch Mr. Wu."

CHAPTER IX

THE MASTER

SEMI-CONSCIOUSNESS came to Holly Blunt with a dull awareness of a splitting headache and an upset stomach. Darkness yet surrounded her. It was a warm, unreal darkness, freighted with a half-strange, half-haunting smell. She lay very still, trying to place the smell. At one moment it seemed so unreal. At another it was so familiar. She was still trying to place it in her memory when her lips were gently pried apart with something that felt like a medicine-dropper. Two or three drops of a tasteless liquid were oozed into her mouth. Half-consciously, she swallowed them. A few minutes later she opened her eyes to see a single electric bulb burning overhead. Her headache was gone. The feeling of nausea had left her stomach. She looked beyond the light at a low, black-bordered ceiling, then down the wall. Her gaze came to a halt on the large, gold-framed picture of the emperor of Japan.

She knew the smell now. It was the smell of the Orient—that peculiar, indescribable smell, a mingling of the odors of spices, oils, bean-cakes, fish, rope, coolies and incense. The smell of the East! Not unpleasant, and yet not particularly pleasant. A smell that one smelled once and never forgot!

Holly Blunt looked on around the room. It was decidedly Japanese, spotlessly clean, the floor covered with matting. Save for a teakwood chest standing against the wall and that picture hanging before her, it was bare of furnishings. She lay on a pallet with a small wooden pillow under her head. She half sat up, and looked behind her. There was a girl standing in the corner.

She was a young thing, strikingly pretty in her light-blue kimono covered with cherry-blossom figures and the little silken, pillow-like cushion in the middle of her back. Her hair was a large, blue-black roll above her forehead. She wore short, white anklets. Otherwise, her feet were bare.

Holly Blunt noticed then that her own low pumps had been removed and were sitting at the end of the chest. The girl spoke to her. Her voice was low, half-musical, and coming with a short, pleasant little laugh that was remindful of the *tink*-ling of gongs.

"You feelee better, Missie Bluntee?"

"Where am I?" demanded Holly. "What am I doing here?"

"I no know." The Oriental girl opened her hands emptily. "Mabe you likee lillee *samisen?*"

The girl moved out of the corner. She crossed the room to the big chest. She opened the lid, and took out a long-necked musical instrument that looked somewhat like a banjo. She turned then, looking at Holly and smiling.

"You likee?"

"No!" Holly sat up. "For heaven's sake, put that thing away! Tell me where I am and what I am doing here! Who are you? Where is this place? How does it happen that I am here?"

"I no know!" Again the girl opened her hands emptily. "You no likee lillee *samisen?*"

"No!" cried Holly, suddenly leaping to her feet. "Put that thing back in the chest! I want to know where I am!"

"Perhaps, madam, I am in a better position to inform you of your whereabouts."

Holly Blunt whirled at the sound of that voice. A papered panel had opened behind her. In the opening stood a tall, square-shouldered Oriental dressed in the royal-blue, elaborately brocaded and gold bedragoned robes of some ancient priest. He wore a small, crown-shaped headdress made of blue silk and gold. He must have been fifty. Perhaps he was a trifle older. His face was long and light-yellow, the cheek-bones high and broad, the eyes glinty-black and decidedly Mongolic. His nose was broad and flat, almost negroid. Thin mustaches, shaved well apart and for the width of his nose, drooped from his upper-lip, the ends of them hanging well below his chin. A big man, broad, deep-chested, powerful, he was standing there with his hands folded across his bosom. He smiled suddenly.

"I am," he bowed slightly, "usually the spokesman here."

"Oh!"

His very presence was a shock. His face was half-benign. At the same time, he was something sinister, a shadow who had appeared there for no good reason. His smile was cold, ironical, tainted with the hint of a sneer. In the folds of his robes, half-peeping through, Holly Blunt caught a glimpse of a knife with a curving blade and a jeweled hilt. He spoke again.

"You are, madam, now in the hands of trusted agents of His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Japan."

"Oh!"

It was all that Holly Blunt could say. For once in her life she felt overwhelmingly helpless. A weakness gripped her. Her knees seemed to wabble. She sank back to the pallet.

"The papers, Cherry Blossom!" The man snapped his fingers with undue impatience as he spoke to the girl in the blue kimono. "Let her see them. I shall presently return."

He was gone then, stepping backward a couple of paces. The panel closed. Holly Blunt sat there staring at it until the girl in the blue kimono touched her on the shoulder with a neatly rolled bundle of newspapers. Holly winced as if from a blow. She laughed then, a little hysterically as she took the papers.

The papers told their own story, of her strange disappearance from her father's old brown-stone on Russian Hill, of the fears of the police and the reporters. The headlines were black, ugly. They recalled the murder of Admiral Takemura and the finding of his skeleton leaning against the lamp-post in the fog. One headline was bold with an editor's suspicions. It read:

FEAR SAME FATE FOR GIRL AS THAT ACCORDED ADMIRAL TAKEMURA

POLICE SO FAR ARE HELPLESS FOR A SOLUTION; MOTHER OF GIRL SUFFERING COMPLETE COLLAPSE.

Silence held Holly Blunt as she read headline after headline and paragraph after paragraph of the story. For a few minutes it seemed that she was not reading about herself. She seemed to be reading the tragic happening that had come to some one else. When she looked up, the panel was open again. The man in the priestly robes was back. He smiled down at her.

"Perhaps you would care to write your father and mother a short note to somewhat relieve their fears?"

"I—I would!" Holly was on her feet in an instant. "I—I would appreciate it so much!"

"Then you may," smiled the man. "You will, however, write a very short note. You can say that you are being treated with all due consideration for the present, though you do not know what awaits you. Here is something I will allow you to copy, word for word." He handed her a folded sheet of paper. "You will neither add nor detract from it other than to add the usual salutations at the beginning of the note. By that, I mean you are at liberty to say 'Dear Father and Mother.' Nothing more."

Holly took the paper dumbly. She unfolded it. It was written in a firm, neat hand. It ran:

> *This is probably the last opportunity I will have to communicate with you. At the moment I am being treated with all due consideration. I am in the hands of certain Japanese agents. I am being held in retaliation for the murder of Admiral Takemura.*

"The note," smiled the man when Holly looked up, "will be mailed in Sacramento."

"But—but a message like that would not relieve them!" she cried, suddenly leaping to her feet. "Why—why, it is as good as telling them I am to be killed."

"But you *will write* it!" The man's tone had grown firm, his black eyes narrowing. "As it is written, so will you write. Besides, you may add such things as I may tell you ——"

"I won't do it!" she cried, suddenly tearing the paper in half and flinging it in his face. "I think I understand it all now. This is worse than murder. This is a scheme to arouse my father. There is no telling what he would do ——"

"We have hopes of him doing several things," cut in the man with a smile. "And you, madam!" he lifted his hand suddenly, pointing a long finger straight at her face, "are here to use as we see fit. You are here to do as we command!"

"I will write no lies for you!"

"Little white flower," the man turned his head slightly to one side, his eyes filling with a half-wistful light, "you are very beautiful in your anger. Your eyes are like the most illustrious jade. The gods have been exceedingly kind to you. In your face they have planted all the wonder and glory of a rising moon. In your body they have planted all the cushions of heaven. You are warming to the eye, my little white flower. When I beheld you, I said to myself, 'Surely the skies smile upon my humble heart to allow my eyes to look upon so lovely a thing.' Yet, woman!" he took a quick step toward her, his face suddenly iron-hard, "in my hands you are. In my hands lie all your warmth and beauty. Look!" He opened his hands, palms-upward before her, and slowly closed them. "Your fate lies in my grasp, to hold and fondle, to caress or bless you, or to crush you, pale flower, like a lotus whose fragrance has blown away on the empty bosom of the four winds of the earth. Know that, from now on," he bowed almost humbly, "that I am both your master and your god, that neither you nor a thousand like you can dominate my will or sway it from a purpose the width of one of the hairs on your lovely head. Here, little white flower," he waved his hands and clamped them back on his chest, "I am the master of both your body and soul, and even, perhaps," he smiled coldly, "in the due course of time, the very warmth of your heart."

"Why—why, you beast!" she gasped. "I ——"

"What, my little one?" he cut in with a smile. "What can you do?"

"I—I will do nothing!" she cried, losing all the grip on herself. "You—you wouldn't dare harm me! *You wouldn't dare!* My father is not a fool! He—he will get to the bottom of all this. He will find you out and—and ——"

"Little flower," he smiled patiently, "suppose he does? What then, my fair one? Even his battleship with all its great guns and devastating projectiles could do no more than destroy the little spark in me that men call life."

"I—I want to get out of here!"

"Only you are not going, little flower."

He took another step closer. She retreated a pace. He followed her steadily, his eyes narrow, the lips curving, the mustaches now aquiver. In his face something terrible was growing. With a sudden scream she struck him hard and flat across the mouth with her closed right hand.

And then it was like the stars falling. With a sharp, fierce cry of rage, he seized her, snatching her to him. His powerful arms flung her to his bosom and pinned her hands and wrists helplessly to her sides. He looked down into her face. His eyes were mean and narrow. His face was like a mask of evil.

"Little fool!" he cried. "Little fool! Did I have you brought to me for an idle notion? No! For a purpose you came. As a purpose you will serve. Before you are an hour older you will be on your knees to me. Begging, my little white flower. Begging with all your heart. With one blow I am going to crush you. All your pride and fire I will wipe away with but the lifting of my hand. I will show you but one thing, but one spectacle. It will not be a spectacle for the eyes of children or old women, or even men with weak stomachs. I do not hesitate to admit that it is to impress you. I do not hesitate to admit that you are to look within a chamber of horrors such as you or no other white flower like you has ever looked upon before. I do not hesitate to tell you that you have come here probably to die, that once here, and once you witness the event you are about to witness, it would be suicide for us if we were to allow you to escape. But I will assure you that there are many deaths, some painless and without terror—and others such as you will witness this morning just as the dawn breaks over the city. You will see the spectacle I have for you. Afterwards, little white flower, I will have many important things to discuss with you. But know, white flower," his voice hardened, "as you view this morning's event that I am your master; that I am the master of horror; that never was there a heart, no matter how strong, that cannot be broken and shaped to the will of other men."

He whipped her wrists behind her back, and grasped them securely in his left hand. She tried to fight. He threw her forward, face-downward on the pallet. It seemed but a minute before he had bound and gagged her. He flung a black cloth over her face then, tying it behind her head. With the strength that seemed to belong to a giant, he picked her up, tossing her over his shoulder.

"Now, my little one," he laughed, "we shall see what we shall see."

Holly Blunt fainted. When she came to she was being carried along a passageway that smelled of underground. Winding and turning, going this way and that, she realized some time later that she was being carried into a damp chamber of some sort.

The black cloth remained over her eyes until she was suddenly stood on her feet on a damp floor. The cloth was snatched from her face then.

"Now, little white flower with a spit-fire heart," intoned the voice of the man who had been carrying her, speaking in a tone as gentle as a whisper of affection, "you are looking into the room of horror and the great well of the seven devils. As you look within, you will see a man whose heart was also strong."

Tilted forward there on her feet, unable to move hand or foot, Holly Blunt had been leaned against a yard-square pane of heavy plate glass. Through it she looked into a stone-walled room that was exactly like an old-fashioned, dome-shaped beehive. It was fully forty feet wide, the white-washed inner wall ending at a round hole covered with a dark grating high overhead. The entrance was a window-like opening, about waist-high and covered with a closely woven lattice of steel. The well stood in the center of it, capped for the moment with a brass dome eight feet across and suspended on a heavy chain stretching to a grooved pulley under the grating.

From the first glance to the last, it was most certainly a den of horror. It smelled of sea-water and death, of rotting fish and flesh, the empty shells of crabs and gnawed bones; and atop of all that ungodly filth of broken shells and scattered bones on the wet floor, two human skeletons lay grinning in the murky light coming from a long iron torch hanging in a bracket above the entrance.

A naked Japanese stood cowering there against the inner side of the cold lattice of steel. The man seemed stricken dumb with horror. He was about fifty-five, rather short and stoutish. His heavy shock of wild black hair seemed to be standing on end. His body looked a trifle flabby, the loose flesh quivering and jerking at spasmodic intervals. His wide-open eyes roved their panic-stricken gaze to the right and left, first to one of the human skulls grinning like silently mocking imps, and then to the other. But, always, his gaze moved back and seemed to rivet itself for minutes at a time on that dome of brass covering the waist-high stone curbing of the well.

Holly Blunt saw the Oriental inside the dome cringe closer to the wall. A shiver shook the man. She saw him steal a glance toward the grinning skull at his left, then a glance toward the one at his right. A low creak from the pulley overhead startled him. The chain to the brass dome of the well was tightening. The dome quivered like some monster about to awaken. A dark ring, as thin as a hair, took shape between the metal and the stone curbing. With painful slowness it started to widen, an inch, two! three! four! The cringing man against the wall started to shake. His teeth chattered. By an effort that seemed to strain every muscle in his body he controlled himself for a moment and straightened.

The dome was a foot high now—now two! two and a half! almost three! The naked man had crouched again, peering, all else forgotten except the rising shaft of darkness growing beneath the dome. Suddenly the man cowered back. A short, hoarse gasp escaped him.

A finger had appeared on the well curbing—a dark and slimy finger nervously feeling. Another joined it, then another. Slowly, a dark, elongated head started to rise, a monstrosity, all ugly head and tentacles. Two wicked, bloodshot little eyes seemed to take stock of the room. The thing slipped over the curbing with alarming swiftness. It came down with a clatter on the bones and broken shells. A shapeless, rapidly moving mass, it coiled, curled and jerked its way to the other side of the room, and settled down to a dark, furiously watching lump.

It was a twenty-pound octopus. Another appeared by the time it had scarcely settled its slimy form against the wall. Like the first, the second was as quick as light. It settled a foot from the other. Then the third, the fourth, fifth, and sixth appeared, all about the same size, all scurrying to the wall to settle in a watching half-circle.

The man against the wall had ceased to gasp. A cringing, shaking thing who seemed robbed of all his blood, he stood there against the window-like lattice. The brass dome had swung higher. From the well now came a short, pig-like grunting. A shiny thing, like the black head of a torpedo, started taking shape, rising. Longer, stronger tentacles were gripping the curbing. Two reddish eyes studied the cringing man against the wall. A low grunting and smacking made itself known.

A wail of terror came from the man against the lattice. For an instant he had covered his face. That ungodly thing in front of him seemed to fill the well. Like a giant diver from the depths, it was waiting. Suddenly, a tentacle, as large around at the butt as the calf of a man's leg, shot forward. Like a giant feeler it tapped the man on the shoulder. He roared with terror, and tore away, sidling along the wall. The octopus came out of the well then. Once it was clear of the curbing, the brass dome was dropped quickly back in place.

Driven mad with terror, the man kept moving along the wall, looking as though he had forgotten all else except that huge monster lying there beside the well. He stopped suddenly, and screamed the scream of a stark mad woman. Cold and sticky cords had suddenly reached up to wrap around his legs. The smaller octopuses were closing in. Holly Blunt saw the giant octopus rise then like an old tree stump pulling itself out of the ground, roots and all. There was a sudden lurch. The giant octopus shot forward. There was a muffled, stifling cry. . . .

Holly Blunt's body went limp. When she opened her eyes she had been turned away from the awful window. The man in the be-dragoned robes was holding her in his arms. He spoke to her, his voice a gentle whisper.

"Listen, little flower, my soul of the rising moon and the scent of heaven," he murmured with his lips close to her ear, "surely your heart has now become as soft as the dew of morning. What command, my heavenly one, could I give you that you would refuse to obey?"

CHAPTER X

"C-H-I-N-K-S!"

FOG hung over San Francisco for thirty-six hours after Holly Blunt had so suddenly been whisked away from her home. It was a thick fog, as gray as powder smoke. During the day, the sun broke through it a few times. Russian Hill once stood cleared for thirty or forty minutes. It was like some monstrous jewel, standing there with its old roofs and walls glittering-wet and its windows aflame with reflected sunlight.

The bay was swathed in the creeping wet clouds. Traffic on the water was congested, the boats slow-groaning through the heavy "pea-soup." An old stern-wheeler, a Sacramento River steamboat, completely off her course, banged into one of the Japanese cruisers and carried away the ship's landing-gear with a side-swiping blow. A stoutly worded note of protest was promptly sent aboard the *Colorado,* but at the end of the thirty-six hours' reign of fog, a howl was lifted by Mr. Y. Takahasha and the commanders of the cruisers that was heard from Washington to Tokyo.

Another Japanese was dead—a well-known exporter of San Francisco and he was a Mr. T. Ishikawa, a gentleman of means and powerful family connections with certain dignitaries of Tokyo—who had disappeared from his bachelor apartment in the Richmond District the night Holly Blunt had been taken from her home.

Dr. Rodin Lafferty had again broken into the headlines with his efficiency. Armed with his little black bag he had swooped to the scene, swooped up his man—or what was left of what had once been a man—and had hurried him off to the autopsy table. His report had been almost identical to the one he had written about the skeleton of Admiral Takemura.

For it was another Admiral Takemura nightmare, nothing more, nothing less. In the lifting fog at dawn, Mr. Ishikawa's skeleton had been found standing against a fireplug like a hat-rack in front of Mr. Takahasha's house at Pacific Avenue and Buchanan Street. Fully dressed, spatted and caned, and wearing a monocle—a jolly habit Mr. Ishikawa had picked up in London—the skeleton had been grinning as jaunty as one pleased, and, as the papers had it, "With the appearance of a certain diabolical mirth at, apparently, the expense of Mr. Y. Takahasha." Old Eternity Bill Mandell looked it over while the police were barnstorming and browbeating the neighborhood with useless questions. He had no comment to make.

"What's the use in a lot of fool talk?" he growled at Captain Lee. "The newspapers are filled with 'So-and-so said this and that!' Our turn will come in the by and by, Andy."

"It doesn't look like it!"

Lee jumped to his feet. It was nine o'clock in the morning. Unlike old Mandell, he had not had a wink of sleep in almost sixty hours. He started pacing the floor nervously. Mandell sat there twiddling his thumbs. Now and then he shook his head. After Lee had stamped up and down the room a dozen times or more, he spoke.

"Burning up energy uselessly, my boy. It doesn't pay in the long ——"

"I can't stand it, Bill!" Lee whirled on him with glittering eyes. "What are we doing! *What are we going to do?* Sit here and stare at each other? My God, man, I want some action! *Action, I tell you!"*

"The cavalry running away with itself, Andy. Just the cavalry charging ——"

"I could cut your old whiskey-sopping throat!"

"Sure!" grinned Mandell. "But they'd hang you for it, my boy! I know you feel that we're not earning our salt. That's a habit of most folks holding government jobs. But this case is loosening up as it goes along. They all do. The main thing is to not let yourself get scared. When I heard the newsboys crying 'Another Skeleton Found!' this morning, I let myself get mighty scared for a second or two. I thought of Holly. I hear that Mrs. Blunt fainted ——"

"It's enough to kill her!"

"Sure, but it won't. Women of the Service are hell for sticking things out, Andy. They're really better than the men in most cases. But we're progressing. We are holding our heads ——"

The telephone rang, cutting him off. He picked it up and barked a husky, "Well, go ahead!" into the transmitter. A heavy, highly excited voice coming out of the receiver told Lee that Admiral Blunt was at the other end of the wire.

"I have a message from Holly!" Blunt was booming. "I'll be in your office with it inside of ten minutes!"

"Fine!" barked Mandell. *"Bully!* And you, Andy," his voice dropped to his old monotone as he hung up the receiver, "just keep your shirt on, my boy, just keep your shirt on. For heaven's sake, don't let Blunt know you're scared. I've never seen you so het-up on a case, anyway. Why, Andy, you act just like some young jackass in love!"

Blunt banged in a few minutes later and threw a letter on the desk.

"Got it just a minute before I called you!" he explained, his excitement lending a high flush to his cheeks and a half-wild light to his eyes. "It looks damned bad to me."

"They always do, admiral!" nodded Mandell, re-moving a single sheet of stationery from the envelope. "Mailed in Sacramento last night at eight o'clock. Hum-m!" He scratched his head. Captain Lee was right behind him, watching eagerly over his big shoulder. "Now let's see what she says."

He picked up a big, powerful reading-glass. Holding it the proper distance above the writing, he sat there intently studying the letter. The writing looked jerky in spots. In others it was neat and firm. The letter read:

> *My dear, broken-hearted father and mother,*
>
> *This is probably the last opportunity I will have to communicate with you. At the moment I am being treated with all due consideration. I am in the hands of certain Japanese agents. I am being held in retaliation for the murder of Admiral Takemuras!*
>
> *Holly.*

"See anything, Andy?" Mandell actually chuckled, and the chuckle brought a quick frown of disapproval to Admiral Blunt's face.

"Yes, Bill! Look!" Lee was leaning on Mandell's shoulder now, and staring through the glass. "Look at the 'c' in 'certain.' See how much harder she bore on her pen? And look at the 'h' in 'held.' Look at the 'in' right after it! Now look what a sloppy 'k' that is in 'Takemuras.' And ——"

"And the 's' on the end of 'Takemura' !" exclaimed Mandell. "Andy, my boy, you're improving!"

"What is it?" demanded Blunt, leaning forward on the desk. "What are you trying to do?"

"Nothing!" Mandell straightened, and took off his glasses. "Holly is a smart girl. I've always told you that, admiral. She ——"

"Get to the point, damn it!" barked Blunt. "I don't need a speech. What have you found?"

"Six letters, admiral." Mandell leaned forward again. "Holly wrote this letter under high pressure of some sort. Maybe with a knife at her throat. It's somebody's most unbrilliant idea of a botch job, but it is a letter that would stir up a lot of trouble if the papers could get their hands on it. Might start race-rioting among the hot-heads. But Holly is not being held by Japs. No, sir! not by a jugful! She has done us a good job, an excellent job! This letter was most surely inspected. Looked at closely. You can bet your boots, it was, admiral! But there was something burning in Holly, something she wanted to contradict ——"

"For God's sake, man!" groaned the admiral, "won't you ever come to what you have found?"

"Here, take the glass!" Mandell handed it and the letter to him. "Take a look for yourself, admiral. Holly knew I would look at this thing. She knew I would study it. Those heavier letters might mean nothing to the naked eye, but string them together under the glass. What do they spell?"

" 'C-H-I-N-K-S!' " spelled the admiral slowly. " 'Chinks!' ' Why, of course it's 'Chinks!' Why—why ——"

"Sure!" Again Mandell chuckled. "I've always said Holly was a bright girl, admiral. Must have got it from her mother's side of the house!"

"You knew this before!" Lee said accusingly.

Mandell cleared his throat. "I knew it at Blunt's the night Holly was taken," he admitted. "Wu Fong Sam made Holly the chocolate. He put some sort of knock-out in her cup. Just in the cup. Somewhere in the house, probably in the basement, there were two or three men waiting for him. I'm inclined to believe there were only two. Rest assured that they were Chinks, not Japs. Wu hates Japs. I got that out of him in a split-second—and without asking the direct question. That would have been foolhardy, would have put him on his guard. I get a lot out of men by looking at their faces. But to go on. Holly went out like a light when she drank the chocolate. Mrs. Blunt came out of the bathroom and almost spoiled things. But they pulled the job just the same. After Mrs. Blunt is out, Wu darts into the room, takes up the cup, rinses it out, spilled a little more chocolate in it, and returns the cup and saucer to its place there beside Holly's chair. (That's how the few drops of water got in the saucer. Old trick. I've met it before.) Then Wu goes to the basement where the others are waiting. They tie him up, hit him on the head to make it look good, and beat it with Holly. A mighty crude job. Rotten bungling, I'd call it. Too rotten ——"

"Go on!" ordered Lee, impatiently. "Keep to the point."

The admiral was staring at Mandell—for once, speechless.

"Old bats must ramble, Andy, old bats must ramble. But very well. I took samples of the chocolate in the cup and some of what was left in the pot. I took out the drain-plug on the bottom of the trap beneath the sink. I turned my samples over to Dr. Steele. There were no fingerprints on the cup, showing that Wu used a dish cloth in handling it. Dr. Steele headed straight for the best chemist in town. About thirty minutes before you came in that night, Lee, he telephoned me. There was a trace of a powerful drug of some sort in the stuff I got out of the trap. No trace of a drug in the rest."

"And that infernal Wu Fong Sam?"

Mandell chuckled. "Blunt didn't know a thing. Didn't intend for him to know anything. Police didn't know, either. Why, I even told the Blunts, Dr. Steele and Wu—and most especially Wu, my boy—what to say to throw the police off the trail!"

"But—but he has been in their service so long ——"

"That he just couldn't do anything to hurt them. Oh, yes, Andy. I'm 'way ahead of you. But if Mr. Wu happened to belong to a powerful tong, he would have to do what the tong said, even if they ordered him to cut his own mother's throat."

He turned to Blunt. "So you see, admiral, even if Holly hadn't been born in China, so that she knew a Chinaman from a Jap immediately, we were progressing on this case. Yes, sir!"

CHAPTER XI

PONIES BEGIN TO TROT

MANDELL fought the idea to the last straw and managed to keep the contents of the letter a secret from the press, but they raided Chinatown. They raided it with a hellish vim and a massed turn-out of detectives and police. They split San Francisco's yellow quarter wide open. They battered down doors and invaded sacred temples and private homes with all the ruthlessness of drunken barbarians. At the same time, Oakland and Sacramento detectives and police were raiding their yellow quarters. But they learned not a thing. Chinatown was patient, "so sorry cause trouble," and so obliging. The detectives and police kept hard at the work for twenty-four hours without a let-up. Mandell looked sick, body and soul, when it was done.

"You wanted action, Andy," he growled, again sitting there at his big desk. "The old cavalry boiling over in you! Blunt wanted it. I hope all this horseplay hasn't killed Holly."

Four days later they were still "in the dark" and with no hopes of "light" in the immediate foreground.

They were keeping a close, silent check on Wu Fong Sam. Blunt's old brown-stone was constantly "under the gun." Men watched it from house-tops with powerful glasses and Admiral Blunt was being constantly watched by old Eternity Bill Mandell's orders.

"They may take a right hot notion," Mandell warned Lee, "to grab off the admiral. Whoever is behind this is playing hard. They'll do anything under the sun to make good their scheme to bring us and the Japs to war. But we're progressing. 'Coming through the rye,' Andy!" He patted his stomach fondly, a habit when well-pleased with himself. "This morning I worked Mrs. Blunt off into a hospital. Dr. Steele's a good old egg. Didn't argue with me like you. Mrs. Blunt's out of our way. Blunt must naturally stay aboard his ship a lot. That gives plenty of rope to our Mr. Wu. He'll make some bobble yet. We're cut in on Blunt's telephone. We've got the lid screwed on everything. When Mr. Wu moves we're off for the races."

But it was killing work. Men slept but little. Captain Lee was slowly, but surely, becoming a nervous wreck. More than a hundred hours had passed without his having slept until Mandell added the human touch to a cup of coffee one night in their room. The colorless drops he put in that cup when Lee's back was turned did the trick. Lee had gone sound asleep in his chair—so sound asleep he was like a dead man who stirred not a muscle when Mandell removed his clothing and rolled him in bed to sleep the clock around.

In the meanwhile, other things had happened. Two Americans had been stabbed to death in Japan. Two others were missing. Tension was high in Washington and Tokyo. A delegation had been ordered out of the White House. The President was losing his patience. There were too many threats of war coming from the "little brown brothers." A wild-eyed, hell-roaring gentleman from the cactus lands of Southwest Texas had made a speech on the floor of the House of Representatives. In good terms, flavored occasionally with a choice Texas "hell" and "damn" uttered with rousing gusto, he had told the House, "It's high time to settle this business like gentlemen, and gentlemen prefer steel, properly supported with powder and ball!" And that had brought another protest from Tokyo.

And then another calamity had happened. This time it was off the Atlantic Coast. A British tramp motor ship, bound for New York from a South American port, went down one night in twenty minutes with all hands after a tremendous explosion forty miles south of Scotland Light. To the fanatical-minded, it brought a new threat of war from another source.

But no threat came from the British, even when it appeared that the ship might have received the same foul play that had befallen the ill-fated *S.S. Shonosuke*. There was no rioting in the British Empire, no gathering of half-crazy mobs about the American embassy. The British accepted the news with calmness. Americans in England and her possessions were treated in the same old blood-brother manner. Not even a radical newspaper in London, one given to all kinds of explosive outbursts, commented on the tragedy other than to sympathize with America "if it was another Pacific Coast disaster." Dignitaries met in Washington and London. They were most civil. The storm expected by fools was no more than a pebble-ripple on the face of a mill-pond. There was no excitement. The gentlemen talked it over. When they were through, the British came to the conclusion that their ship had gone to the bottom of the sea "from an explosion of high-test oils in her fuel-tanks and very probably caused by an overheated exhaust and insufficient ventilation in the engine room."

"Just what you could expect of the Tommies!" had commented Mandell. "Brains and confidence. They go so well together."

But he was a sick man sitting there at the desk now. Early in the morning two more Japanese ships of war—this time big, armored cruisers—had come into the bay. Again the usual salutes had been exchanged, but there was tension in the air. The ships seemed deliberate when they anchored in places that would nicely position the *Colorado* for the full benefit of a cross-fire between them and the two cruisers lying just off Angel Island. It seemed so deliberate that

Admiral Blunt again shifted the *Colorado,* moving her on up the bay to a place where her guns would be in a position to sweep the harbor.

"Blunt's dangerous," Mandell kept telling Lee. "The Japs are trying to bluff him. He knows it well enough."

Speculation ran high when the battleship *Arizona* steamed through the Golden Gate at four o'clock with her fighting tops wrapped in a silvery trail of fog hanging like a flimsy banner over the bay. She dropped anchor off the point of Alcatraz Island. As if she brought good luck to the ever-impatient Lee, the wheels of action started turning at last for him.

It came at nine o'clock over the telephone and with another heavy blanket of fog spread over San Francisco as night settled.

"Wu Fong Sam has left the house!" barked the receiver. "Gone!"

"Well," growled Mandell, "you've got a couple of good tails tied to his kite, haven't you?"

"No!" shot back the receiver. "He disappeared *inside* the house. Never left it, but he's gone. Blunt's aboard his ship. We searched the house from basement to attic. There's something strange about it. You'd better get up here, Eternity, as soon as you can!"

"Coming!" snapped Mandell, and he hung up the receiver. "Grab your hat, Mister Cavalry! I think our ponies are beginning to trot!"

CHAPTER XII

A LADDER UNDERGROUND

COMING across a vacant lot, Captain Lee and Mandell approached the old house from the rear. They found it wrapped in silence and a brooding, ghostly darkness. Six men, made ghoulish in the fantastic shadow-weaving of the fog, were watching it like alert hawks. One of them detached himself from a black wall of shrubbery in the garden. On noiseless feet he came forward, a short, stoutish man of thirty-five, with pale-blond hair, soft-blue eyes and a cherub face that somehow gave him more of the air of a ladies' barber than a detective. He was Buck Stone, and—as criminals had described—"a bird three times tougher than his name."

"So he's gone at last, eh, Buckey?" whispered Mandell. "It's no use to ask you if you're sure. Tell me about it."

"He was here until about thirty minutes before I telephoned," explained Stone. "There were no telephone calls. He was simply puttering about the house. His room's in the basement. He went to it after turning out the lights on the upper floors. Dick Macey thought he heard a window raised and lowered. I finally took a chance and rang the door-bell. No answer. I then took a further chance and flashed my light through his window. He was gone. We searched the house then."

"Well, he slipped through your lines, my boy."

"He did not!" Stone's voice had suddenly hardened. "An alley cat couldn't do it, Eternity!"

"Then," speculated Mandell, "he got next that he was being watched."

"I'll deny that also." There was a pinch of surliness in Stone's voice. "Hell, Eternity, I know my business! This is not the first spot I've laid. Besides, I picked my own crew. I know every man, just how tight he can play his cards ——"

"All right, Buckey, my boy!" Mandell patted him on the shoulder with an affectionate ham of a hand. "Don't lose patience with a cranky old bat like your little Uncle Willie. We'll take a look at the house. My cavalry escort, here, has bumble-bees in his pants. Let's go, Andy. You and the rest of the boys take care of the outside show, Buckey. Give us the high-sign if you catch our little playmate suddenly returning."

Like burglars making a haul, their flashlights held so that they made slits of light as narrow as slender sword-blades, they went through the house from bottom to top, and from top to bottom.

Wu Fong's room interested Captain Lee more than anything else. There in one corner of the basement, it was the usual servant's room with a wash-bowl, toilet and shower partitioned off in one corner of it. It had two small windows. One of them looked out on a narrow alley paved with worn, red bricks. The other faced the little garden and was almost completely hidden in dense shrubbery.

Captain Lee went over the room as if his life depended on finding something. He was exactly like a near-sighted beggar hunting his vermin. Down on his hands and knees with his slit of light held low, he studied the floor, sounding it and looking for cracks. He rolled back the rug. He went over the walls. There was a clothes closet in the corner opposite the shower. Lee examined it almost desperately. Its floors and walls seemed rock-solid. Mandell came in and found him on his knees.

"Finding anything, son?"

"No!" Lee's tone was gruff. "But I will!"

"Are you sure, Andy," Mandell was as patient as the sun, "that our little birdie didn't fly out the window and disappear in the shrubbery?"

"He did not! Buck Stone knows his business! That Chink's too smart for that. I've never believed the police theory, either, of how Holly was taken away. They say she was rammed into a car or a cart of some sort in the alley. I'm playing my cards in another direction. And mind you," he looked up with his face bitter in the darkness, "when I get my hands on that damned Wu, he's going to talk to me. I'm tired of watching and waiting. I'll strap an electric flat-iron to that Chink's feet—and I'll turn on the juice!"

"Brutal, Andy," chuckled Mandell. "The government wouldn't stand for it."

"Damn the government!" snapped Lee, turning abruptly back to his work. "I'm sick of the milk-sop ideas in the shape of orders always being passed along to us from some weakling on the inside of politics and holding down a desk and warming a chair in Washington!"

He worked on steadily. In near despair, he finally gave up the room for the time being. He stood there wiping copious perspiration from his forehead as he leaned half-wearily against the jamb of the doorway leading out into the basement. He heard Old Eternity Bill chuckle. There had been a slight, scraping sound a few seconds before the chuckle. Lee hurried to him.

There stood the old man beside a big, wooden bin filled with yellowed newspapers and magazines, evidently used to start fires in the furnace.

"You see, Andy, my boy," said Mandell, gently, "it never pays to get excited. Burns up useless energy, gives you indigestion. I discovered, you see, that this thing would move. Bully, eh?"

The heavy bin had been pushed to one side. In the sword-blade of light from Mandell's flashlight was the round, ugly-black "man-hole" of an old sewer. Its iron lid had once been sealed under the concrete of the basement floor, but the concrete had been expertly chiseled away, and the lid was gone. They looked down in the hole, and saw a step-ladder.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GIANT OF THE SEWER

AT LAST here was something tangible, something one could place a hand upon. Captain Lee flung his topcoat across Old Eternity Bill Mandell's arm with a curt "Keep it for me!" He went down in that hole like a man fleeing for his life. Mandell tried it, but the hole was by far too small for that elephantine figure. He got down far enough for his feet to reach the head of the ladder, but right there his stern stopped him. There he sat, with eyes rolling and blinking, a human hippopotamus surprised at his momentary stupidity for ever tackling such an undignified thing. He pulled himself out of it. He got up with a grunt.

"Oh, well," he wheezed, looking down into the hole, "I'm not as spry as I used to be, Andy."

"Close that hole like it was," ordered Lee. "Stay here until I get back, and grab that Chink if he comes before I do."

Lee was gone then, with his stubby automatic pistol in his right hand and his flashlight in his left. Instinctively he was heading toward the general direction of Chinatown.

It was an old sewer, one that, for some reason, had been long abandoned by the city. Perhaps it was one that had existed before the fire and earthquake of 1906. It was of the usual diameter, walled with brick-and-stone, and floored with concrete, about six feet high and seven or eight wide. In places the trough-like groove in the center of the floor was wet. Occasionally Lee caught the poisonous odor of gas. Soon its course was steeply downward. He came to several places where there were steps left in the concrete. At one place he came to a rusty iron ladder. Here the sewer dropped almost straight downward for a matter of thirty feet. Then it sloped gently away again. At intervals the earth rumbled, telling him he was crossing beneath a street teeming with heavy traffic.

It seemed that he had traveled a thousand yards before he came to an intersection. Other intersections followed. In a little while a feeling came over him that he was losing himself. So many other old sewers were joining in. Gradually they were becoming a maze as hopeless as the labyrinth of Minotaur, the mythological half-man and half-bull monster of Crete.

Some of them were marked with the faint signs of footprints, but none of the signs were for long. They lasted here and there for a length to arouse sudden hopes, then they vanished, leaving no tell-tale signs on the dry concrete. At last, Lee was at a gloomy, evil-smelling spot that seemed to be the meeting place for all the abandoned sewers of the city. He had halted and was standing there staring to the right and left when the huge figure of a man, clad in filthy rags of loose blue cotton, pounced upon him from behind with the silence and fury of an attacking leopard.

Lee was dashed face-forward to the floor of the sewer. The attack was so unexpected, so quick and furious, Lee's gun and flashlight flew out of his hands, the gun clattering along on the hard floor for ten feet. The flashlight bounced, spun like a whirling bee, and came to a halt with its tiny bulb still burning and throwing a still, round spot of light on the arched stone ceiling.

Quick, powerful hands were now closing on Lee's throat from behind and above. For a moment the brutal fall had dazed him, but he was suddenly stirring. Muscles knotted, leaping and straining into ropes and cords beneath the skin.

The man on Lee's back was trying to keep Lee's head on the floor. His hands were like stumpy-nailed claws, the fingers long, hideously knuckled and covered with callouses. They were big and broad hands. The hard-work hands of a powerful man. In a moment more they would have shut off Lee's breath and made him helpless, but he moved suddenly and with the spasmodic jerking and twisting of an eel.

It shook the man on Lee's back, and then Lee was coming up. He got to his knees, then was dashed back to the floor. But it was a mistake on the part of the man in the rags. Lee gave no expected resistance. He bobbed. It threw the man atop of him off his balance. The man shot forward, heels over head, and landed on the concrete with an explosive grunt.

Lee was on his feet with a bound. He was no quicker than the man who had attacked him. With surprising suppleness, the man was up, crouching wrestler fashion, the stumpy-nailed hands spread. For the first time now Lee could see what he looked like.

He was a huge Chinaman, well over six feet tall—a one-eyed, noseless beast of a thing with his ears trimmed and sharpened devil fashion. His lower lip was gone, leaving his broad, yellow teeth to gleam like fangs in the murky light. His chest was broad, deep and hairy through his rags. The muscles of his arms bulged. He made a short, hissy sound with his ungodly ugly mouth. He shifted his feet, setting himself.

Lee had heard of men like him—men butchered and maimed in *tong* wars and for Oriental offenses until a weak man would feel faint to even look at them. Without a doubt, the man was an excellent example of a terrible curse inflicted upon him for some crime. Without a doubt the man had once been handsome enough in his strong, Neanderthal Man way, but a glance told that his curse had left him a mad brute, a beast who despised himself and all others upon whom he could exert his strength.

He was not to be tricked again. That glinting one eye measured the distance between him and Lee with uncanny accuracy. He was a thing who would sneer at the thought of using a knife or a gun to rid himself of a foe, and with another hissy sound he shot forward with his hands spread in the expectation that Lee would dart to one side to avoid him.

It was the giant's second mistake. Lee let him come. Lee had not shifted his feet an inch. The giant was upon him with the force of a charging bull. It was his own force that drove Lee's right fist to the wrist in his stomach. It stopped him. It paralyzed him. He fell on Lee with that ball of hard right fist buried in him. Before he could get away, Lee's left fist had shot up, burying itself in the man's throat—a deadly dangerous blow, one that more often kills than merely stops a man's charge.

The giant plunged backward. He fell loosely, his head striking the concrete with force enough to crush a thinner skull, and the long arms that were powerful just an instant before, flinging out on either side of him and as powerless now as the arms of a man struck dead by lightning.

Lee skipped on over him, snatching up his gun and his flashlight.

CHAPTER XIV

HOLLY!

THE giant started to stir even as Captain Lee darted back to him. It was another example of the man's alarming strength and his ability to stand punishment that would have either killed an ordinary man or left him lying there in a state of complete unconsciousness for possibly an hour or more. Andrew Lee had seen a man killed with half as hard a punch to the Adam's apple. He had struck the giant with every muscle in his body behind the blow. His fist had gone straight to the danger-spot with bullet-trueness. But the giant was not a man. He was a beast for punishment, a massive chunk of beef, blood and bull-strength, and all of it—without a shadow of doubt—backed by years of suffering and humiliation caused by his horrible mutilation. He was simply a man-shaped, low-browed, animated brute who looked upon life as a galling pill, ever-bitter and good only for the destruction he could bring until death came to close his account—and he would welcome it with open arms.

He shook his head like a fight-drunk bull about to bellow, and tried to sit up. Captain Lee was too quick for him. Lee spun him over, throwing him flat and hard, and face-forward on the concrete. Lee snatched the big, stumpy-nailed hands behind the man's massive back. His handcuffs clicked a few seconds later, locking the thick, deeply scarred wrists together.

The giant muttered something in Chinese. His voice was thick, stupid. Around his waist was a frayed piece of greasy rope doing service as a belt. Lee drew one end of it over the link-swivel of the handcuffs. He tied it in a hard knot, and then used the other end of the rope to draw up the man's big, rag-covered feet. Lee gagged him then with his handkerchief, forcing it into the ugly mouth. As he finished tying the ends of the handkerchief behind the broad, shaggy head, he caught a glimpse of the giant's shoulder through his ragged shirt. The skin there was strangely white. On it, bitten deep in the puckered flesh at that spot, was an ugly Chinese symbol that, at some time, had been burned in the skin with a red-hot iron.

Now that he had the man in his power, Lee wondered what he was going to do with him. If there was any means of forcing him to talk, he would be useful. That was a certainty. Lee doubted it, and yet he did not want to leave him there. He was debating the question when he heard cautious footsteps coming. He switched off his light, the gun in his hand ready for anything. A low voice came to him a moment later.

"Gloomy as hell in these things, Dick. Wonder where he went."

For all his impulsive running off alone in that winding maze of old, long-abandoned sewers, Lee could have yelled for joy. An answer to the question that had been troubling him had come. He switched on his light. It seemed but a moment more before Buck Stone and Dick Macey were joining him.

"What have you got, Andy?" half whispered Stone. "Looks as big as a cow."

In a few seconds, speaking in a guarded tone, Lee told them of the giant's sudden attack on him. Stone rolled the giant over on his side, and gasped with the sheer horror of the man's face.

"Ye gods, Andy," he whispered hoarsely, "what a living nightmare!"

"This guy's a bad one!" Dick Macey had squatted beside the giant and was studying the awful face and trimmed ears in the bright glare of his flashlight. "He looks like some old-time hatchet-man whose feet have slipped somewhere in his career and put him sorely down on his luck. What'll we do with him?"

"Get him back to Bill," ordered Lee, "if you fellows can find the way."

"No trouble to find the way." Macey stood up. "I marked it. I always carry a couple of sticks of chalk in my pocket."

"Wonderful idea for right now," nodded Lee. "I wish I could even think on this hell-fired job, but something seems to have me tied to the starting-post. I can't get going, can't find myself."

"It's all in the breaks, Andy," grinned Stone. "Remember our Utah bank robbery job? I was so worthless Eternity swore he was going to have me bodily kicked off the government pay-roll!"

"And on the job before that," nodded Macey, "it was me ——"

"And before that," cut in Stone, "it was Eternity himself. Well," he hitched up his belt, "let's get going, Dick. Reckon this gink'll walk for us, Andy, if we untie his feet?"

"Very little chance of it, boys, but you can untie his feet and try anything you like."

And Lee was almost right. The giant repeatedly refused to budge an inch. Stone kicked him. Macey put an old-fashioned, nickel-plated "twister" on the man's wrist, but the giant was an insensible ox, as stubborn as a mad bull. The stubbornness held until Stone, as a sheer bluff, struck a match as if to set fire to the rags on the big feet. The giant stirred then, nodding his head. For some reason, he seemed to have an overwhelming horror of fire.

Stone and Macey hurried the giant away. Left alone again, and now aided by a stick of chalk provided by the thoughtful Macey, Lee went on with his exploring. He had always been more or less of a "lone wolfer" on a job, had always believed in the "scatter" method of working a case. "Pair Work" had its uses in certain places, even as "all together" had its place. Right at the moment he wanted to be alone. He had had experience enough in underground passages. He had handled the case of a murdered Army pay-master and a robbery in Manila. The ancient walls of Manila with their treacherous old Spanish dungeons and underground pitfalls had figured strongly in the case. They had claimed one of his men—a fair-haired, blue-eyed young fellow from Virginia—to a fate far worse than death. After being lost in the underground passages, tunnels and torture wells grinning with skeletons hanging in rusty chains, the man had emerged a howling, screaming maniac with the eyes torn out of his head by his own hands.

It had left its indelible mark on Captain Andrew Lee. Tragedies like that do things to men—even to commanders of hard-riding, hard-fighting and swearing troops of cavalry. The underground—even the sewer-underground of a city like San Francisco—was a world within a world, a most unexpectedly tricky territory filled with ever-lurking mysteries and dangers there in its eternal darkness. Never would there be another memory like the one of Manila if Andrew Lee could possibly do anything to prevent it!

Glad to be alone again, he went on inspecting the ghostly passageways. He followed them one after another, returning each time to the "hub" of the maze, the place where the giant had attacked him. Where the giant had come from remained a mystery, but at the end of the third trip back to the hub, Lee again encountered Stone and Macey.

"We may never find old man Blunt's pretty dame," Stone told him, "but you shot over one of your fast ones tonight, Andy, when you pulled down your handsome Jumbo."

"Bill knew him, then?"

"After fifteen years, yes," nodded Stone.

"How could any man forget a bird cut up like that!" put in Macey. "And I guessed him right at the first jump."

"A hatchet-man he was!" agreed Macey. "Eternity knew him the minute he laid eyes on him. Couldn't help it. Eternity sent him up for life at the Fort Leavenworth pen for killing a fed' in a tong war in Seattle twenty years ago. Looked then just like he does now. Escaped nine or ten years ago after splitting a guard's head open with an axe. He'll probably get the works this time."

"What did Bill do with him?"

"Sent Tracey to Headquarters with him. No chance of that rooster getting away again. We ——"

"All right!" Lee waved his flashlight impatiently, eager to be alone again, "go on with your rat-killing. We've got to find something else somewhere in this mess."

Four hours later he was still searching the old walls. He had twice renewed the batteries in his flashlight from extra batteries carried in a belt-kit.

Once he had been close to Stone and Macey, but he had kept back in one of the sewer branches while they passed him. He was still trying to find where the giant had come from. It seemed that he had slow-tramped countless miles. In places dead air had almost stifled him, in others it was nauseating, the smells so awful they were like the stink of rotting human flesh.

One place had twice driven him away from it. It was down an exceptionally long passage that was twisted and broken as though an earthquake—one that had writhed like a dying serpent—had bent it out of its course a dozen times. In places the arched stones had sagged overhead. Black, long-stagnant water covered its floor at another place and disappeared around a broken bend in the walls that had left a pile of stones tumbled down and bearded with a filthy-green mould.

It was that water that held him. It looked the consistency of an over-thick soup. It was blackish-green in splotches, black as ink in others. From it a slow, eternal gas seemed to rise that bit his nostrils with the sting of acid.

He went back to it for the third time. As he stood there a yard from the edge of it, he switched off his light to save his last batteries as much as possible. He had been standing there possibly a minute when he saw something that startled him.

It was a reflection of light on that nasty, black water!

Lee held his breath. His heart started thumping his chest like the low, quick beating of a drum. The reflection of light lay there on the water for three or four seconds. It was gone then, and for a half-minute more Lee stood there wondering if his eyes were not playing tricks on him.

He moved forward then without switching on his light. Like an icy ooze the water clutched his feet. It grew deeper, a thick scum mounting his ankles. It kept growing higher until it was well up on the calves of his legs.

The darkness was like thick, black lead poured over his eyes. It seemed that he could feel it on his face, his throat and hands. He would have sworn it. It had the sleek touch of the finest velvet—such a soft, such a downy caress to it. It was like a steam, a cool, dry vapor.

It would have been nice had it not been for that icy, soup-thick water clutching his ankles. It was like wading in the soft, rot-jellied belly of some slimy dead monster. And, God, what a stench!

He reached the bend and the pile of mould-bearded stones. He was moving slowly, cautiously, as noiselessly as the darkness itself. He put out his hand. He touched the damp, slime-slick stones. They had the feel of a half-frozen fog covered with grease. He rounded the bend, bumped his head against the sagged arching of the stones, and stooped.

The water drew away from his feet and legs as he kept moving on. At last he realized that he was out of it and on the dry concrete of the sewer floor again. He straightened and put up his left hand. The arched stones and bricks were again smooth overhead. Even the air had changed. It was cool and clean. But the darkness was the same—that velvety caress against his cheeks, his throat and hands.

A sound came to him. It was low and faint. He could not locate it. It seemed to rise all around him, first here, close to his cheek, then there, further away, going away, dying. He tried to strain his ears and make them tell him what it was. It did not seem to be anything in particular. Then it was rising, growing quicker, sharper, frantic with lifting alarm.

He knew what it was now. It was a woman sobbing! In leaps and bounds the sobs went up. They broke into a shrill, hysterical shriek. It was followed by another, and another. Then, like a woman going to pieces, there came a rush of words.

"Please! Please! *Please!* Haven't you just one—oh, only just *one!* little pinch of human blood in your heart!"

Captain Andrew Lee's heart skipped a beat, then pounded furiously, and skipped again. He knew that voice. There could be no mistake. None! That voice belonged to Holly Blunt!

CHAPTER XV

THE BEAST LAUGHS

CAPTAIN LEE switched on his light, whipping its slender ray to the right and left, then behind him and overhead. A few yards in front of him was a pile of earth, stone and broken bricks. There the old sewer had caved in. Above the ungainly pile of the fall-in was a yawning hole dome-shaped upward in the earth. Lee lowered his light, approaching it cautiously. Such things were dangerous. Sometimes the mere vibration of a voice or any other sound would cause more earth and stone to fall in such places.

Holly Blunt's voice had lowered to a steady sobbing that, at times, faded completely away. Once Lee heard a sharp, commanding voice say something to her. The girl sobbed some reply. A sound of harsh laughter followed. Right now a strange silence held the darkness beyond the pile of the fall-in.

It was startling, that hush. Lee moved on cautiously. He switched off his light and ran his right hand along the top of the fall-in. There was not room for him to crawl over it, but he set to work there in the darkness, carefully pulling away the stones and brick. When he encountered dirt he scratched it away, digging into it dog-fashion.

Holly Blunt's voice came to him again. It rose sharp and penetratingly shrill, then died away as if drowned out by a metallicly flat laugh. A man's curse came then.

"By the blood of the Great White Cock, you are a fool, my pale flower! I swear it! Would you have your own slender bones grace a fire-hydrant or lean with a leering grin against a lamp-post?"

"But—but I can't!" the girl sobbed. "Oh, I *couldn't* do it!"

"Why, my little one?" Again there was a flat, metallic laugh. "Is not life yet fairly sweet to you? You are young and beautiful. Perhaps there is yet much ahead of you ——"

"There is only death here!" Holly cut in in a desperately calm voice now. "Only terrible loathsome death in your clutches! You are not a man. If you ever were you have lost all the precious sense of it. You are a monster—oh, a laughing, sneering monster, whose every pore reeks with the stench of dead men's blood. It is upon your hands. It covers your hands, your heart! Your soul is steeped in it!"

"Yes, my pale, pale flower," answered the man's voice. This time it seemed infinitely gentle. "But may I, too, remind you of something, my pale blossom whose tender throat now quivers like the breast of a nightingale bursting into song? I believe it is written, in your own most precious classics, that, 'Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones' ——"

"I—I live in no glass house!"

"No, my scent of heaven?" There was a short, wicked splatter of laughter. "Listen, soul of my eye, you perhaps forget your father. He is a murderer as much as I ——"

"You *lie!*"

"But, pale flower, he is a soldier," the man's voice was going on. "A soldier! One who goes to sea, it is true, heavenly one, but no matter. It is little different whether one rides to war across the land on a beautiful horse of flesh and blood and bone, or a horse of iron and steel steaming like a dark monster of death through the sea. Blood is blood, whether you draw it with a sword or spill it with a roaring gun. Your father makes a business of it. He draws blood for a certain sum in dollars and cents, like a hatchet-man earning a fee, my dew on the flowers. He drew his share of the blood when he steamed into the battle of Manila Bay to sink the Spanish vessels of war. He drew his share in the battle of Santiago, little one. He was in the thick of some very disastrous fighting during the last war. There he used his deadly gas-shells, the kind that made men scream and die trying to vomit up their lungs ——"

"Stop it! *Stop it!*" cried the girl. "I—I can't stand it!"

"No, pale one?" There was another short laugh. "You are, as your writings say, 'A doctor who cannot swallow his own pills!' And you were so thoughtful, little one, to remind me of the little blood we sometimes draw here! *Hai!*" He laughed again. "Soul of the lotus, jewel of my eye, we are but lice drawing our half-drop share of blood from an ocean of it when you stop to compare us to your most illustrious father. No one decorates our chests with medals, it is true ——"

"Stop, I tell you! *Stop!*" screamed the girl. "You—you are so vile."

"Yet, pale one, you will obey me!" The man's voice had hardened. "As I command so will you follow! There is yet an opportunity of life for you. China is a large land. In spots it is very fair. A land of sun and flowers, of lovely gardens and quaint old temples, so old that even the gods have forgotten their age. I might take you there, pale flower."

"I—I cannot do this thing you demand of me! I—I will die before I will!"

"Oh, no, fair one, they never do!" The old, flatly metallic harshness had come back into the man's voice. "I command that you do this without forcing me to resort to the perhaps slower but certain way. I do not wish to subject you to the Throne of Torture. You have seen the room with the well of the seven devils. You are by far too fair for me to stand and watch your flesh torn mouthful by mouthful from the bones by the parrot-like bills of the seven devils. I offer the way to save you. Your heart is strong, but no heart is strong enough for that, and once it is ordered and written in the great book for you to die, then not even I could save you. Do you see the point, fair one?"

"Yes, you want war," Holly Blunt's tone had become low, deeply thoughtful. "I wrote one letter for you. Surely I was mad. I had witnessed enough to make a woman—and I believe most men, also—mad. You are trying to trick my country into fighting a battle your own country is too weak or too cowardly to fight for herself. If I must die, then let me die."

"Yet we would only find another to take your place!"

"Then go find her or him." The girl's tone had come to a pitch of desperate resignation. It was as though she knew that the end of everything was at hand. The daughter of a soldier, a born fighting man of the sea, she seemed to be trying to face it as Beauregard Blunt would have faced it. "Please go now. Leave me alone with Cherry Blossom. Somehow I cannot feel that she is one of you. She seems but a helpless thing caught in the tangle of your cowardly, one-sided power here."

"You have such lovely skin." The man's voice was intoning softly again. "It is a pity, jewel of the stars, to know that the wise old man of the Throne of Torture will soon order you made into a thing so ugly strong men will faint at the sight of your face. You saw Kai Dai, the giant. In your language, my fair one, his name means Damned Fool, or its equivalent. He is that. One look at him and you know he is a madman. I am so sorry, little flower, that you are such a fool. For you will yet do as you are commanded, only you will do it with an eye gone out of your head and stark madness shining from the other. Yang Po-liang, the Imperial Master of the Throne of Yama, has decreed it. Little rose of the sunshine, let me again tell you I am sorry. . . ."

Captain Lee heard no more of it. He had, at last, worked himself over the pile of earth, stone and broken bricks. He was in another passage now. To his left, scarcely twenty feet away, a light made a bright-gold streak of light through a crack under a stout door of heavy oak planks.

Flashlight and automatic pistol ready, Lee started toward the door. Up until now he had been moving with the silence of a ghost, but a gravel suddenly moved under his foot now, making a slight, grating sound. Some one stirred in front of the door. There was a sharp *click.* A light came on overhead. A man in front of the door screeched a warning in Kwangtung dialect.

"Hul Soung!—Um Cha!"

It was Wu Fong Sam! He darted to one side, ducking low. A long, nickel-plated revolver gleamed in his hand. His eyes sparkled like rubies in the light. They were wild eyes, the eyes of a man going to kill. His revolver was coming up like a sweeping arc of light.

Captain Lee fired, his automatic ripping a hot gash of flame forward, the all-deadening noise of the explosion appearing to shake the passage. The revolver flew out of Wu Fong Sam's hand. He took a shuffly step forward, and fell with a round hole suddenly spouting red in almost the exact center of his forehead.

Then, as if he had been shot dead in his tracks, Captain Lee was falling, going down from the brutal blow of a brick, held in a huge, paw-like hand, striking the back of his head.

It was Kai Dai, the noseless beast of the passage. There he stood with the brick still in his hand and the crumpled figure of Captain Lee at his feet. He lifted his hands. They were covered with blood. Lee's handcuffs were still on the big wrists, but the swivel-link between them had been broken, snapped apart like a pipe-stem.

What did Kai Dai care for handcuffs! He threw his brick down, clapped his sticky hands like a suddenly happy gorilla, and laughed. It was the laugh of a madman, a strong, far-reaching *yah! yah! yah!*-ing that was exactly like the braying of a wild ass.

CHAPTER XVI

THE VOICE OF CHINA

A TINY-LITTLE old man laughed. Captain Andrew Lee's slowly awakening brain was sure of nothing else, but he was absolutely positive of that. Things were hazy, ill-portioned, a continuous fanfare of ever-changing images and forms that were, as the Chinese have put it, neither horse nor donkey. They came and went in an unholy phantasma, always changing, never twice the same. There was no sense to it! It was like a stage play conceived by the whirlpool brain of a mad director and the characters sketched and breathed to life by some equally mad artist shaking with the terror-chills of a delirium tremens. A gold-yellow moon, swinging with a wild swaying overhead, steadied and became a cluster of lights burning in ornamental brass bowls and giving off pleasingly lazy and delightfully fragrant little spirals of pinkish incense smoke.

And the old man laughed. It was an exceptionally nice laugh, a sort of incantation, like a part well-studied in some bit of music timed to come at a certain moment for a certain effect. It was euphony personified, not a harsh Gabriel's trumpet blast or a wild mare nickering of some drunken Missourian expressing mirth.

A voice started speaking in a frightfully polite tone behind and above Lee.

"Know now, white man, that you are before Yang Po-liang, the All-Seeing, All-Omnipotent Imperial Master of the Seventh Temple of Yama, the King of Hell. It is a *tong* of ancient China, so old, white man, that not even the great books of its sacred writings fathom the date of its beginning, for in the halls of its temples there is neither day nor night. In this place, white man, our gods and our laws are our own. Knaves and fools upon your streets may laugh at us. In your courts of law your judges may decide whether we live or die, but in this place the tables turn. Here, we worship our own gods and keep the sacred vows of our ancestors. Here, white man, only the voice of China speaks. I would advise a civil tongue in your head."

It was quite a pretty speech, no doubt a carefully studied one, impressive and to the point, even though flowery in spots—"Jade tones from a golden mouth." Or was it "Arsenic soaked in honey!" Lee could not see the speaker, for the Secret Service man was lying on his back on a big, gold-colored rug. His head and shoulders were pillowed on a high cushion. His hands were tied behind his back.

And there in front of him, sitting among the spiralling smoke of incense bowls on the golden altar of a great, bull-headed idol, was the tiny-little old man who had laughed. And his name was Yang Po-liang—grand dodo bird or something of the sort. His title was hazy. A little too long, Lee decided. His brain was still in a slow-lifting fog. He lay there silently, and stared at Yang Po-liang.

For all that mattered, the man might have been a thousand years old. His face was an odd little face, so very old, so everlastingly wrinkled, and so thin its tawny skin seemed dried to the bones of its head and skull. Tiny pock-marks pitted its multitudinous lines and cross lines. The nose was like a shriveled button, freckled endlessly with pits and uptilted. The mouth was an old-woman mouth, drawn and puckered as if about to whistle a tune. It was not a nice face. At the same time it was not an exceedingly evil one. It seemed too near the verge of laughter and the beady, golden-brown eyes teeming with scarcely restrained mirth.

He was dressed in ceremonial robes of flowing scarlet, the garments heavily brocaded and woven with golden images from the yard-wide funnels of sleeves to the sweeping skirts. His head was bare and hairless, though an enormous headpiece, representing the bull-headed idol behind him, rested on a drum-shaped table at his right. At the moment the man was patiently cracking watermelon seeds and expertly skinning them between his teeth, a feat considered an art by Chinamen the world over.

Captain Lee turned his head to the right, then the left to further take stock of his surroundings. What had happened to him after he had shot Wu Fong Sam was yet a mystery. He vaguely remembered a blow from behind, but there was nothing else except a throbbing pain in the back of his head. He lay there and kept looking to the right and left.

He was in an immense room, stone-walled and lighted by intricately wrought Oriental lamps of brass. It was like some medieval hall, an old-time gathering place for kings, princes and knights. The Yama thing stood thirty feet high—a huge, man-bodied monster of brass and teak with an enormously bloated belly. A long rug covered the floor. There were no visible signs of doors or windows. In short, the room was like a vast tomb crammed to overflowing with Oriental temple-splendor; and as an old, old little god on a smaller throne, there sat Yang Po-liang gnawing away like a mouse at his watermelon seeds. Suddenly he leaned forward, and spoke.

"So you are a detective who came here spying!" His voice had changed. There was none of the pleasantry in it that had marked his laughter. It had become harsh, biting. He laughed again, and the laughter had changed. It was empty and wavering now—a laugh that might have come from the hollow throat of a ghost. "Spying and *shooting!*"

He leaned back in his seat. For a few moments it looked as though he was about to go to sleep. But he stirred again, coming back to life with a sudden twinkle in his tiny, pale-brown eyes.

"Spying and shooting!" he repeated. "You whites kill quickly when you kill!"

"No faster than you Chinks!" Captain Lee was finding his voice at last. He tried to sit up, but a quick dizziness forced him back. "You, of course are speaking of Wu Fong Sam?"

"Who else, white fool!"

"I was just wondering." Lee's tongue was a trifle thick and his mouth dry. The throbbing pain in his head was getting worse. At times he felt that it would blind him. "I only wanted to make sure."

"Eh?" Yang Po-liang leaned forward, his face intent with sharp interest for a split-second. "Sure of what?"

"That I didn't waste my lead on the treacherous dog!" Some of its old snap and fire was finding its way back into the captain's voice. "Where is Miss Blunt?"

"Do you propose to question me?" Yang Po-liang's lips puckered as if about to whistle. "I, alone, ask questions here, white fool!"

"Well," frowned Lee, "yes. You seem to hold the light of all the exalted wisdom here. Somebody behind me that I couldn't see gave me a string of your titles a few minutes ago. If he wasn't lying—and if all your supposed accomplishments, or even half of them, are true—you should be able to tell a man when the world will come to an end. I believe I heard you mentioned as the all-seeing, all-omnipotent chief bimbo of hell and high water—or something equally as high-powered."

"A civil tongue, fellow!" again warned the man behind Lee. "Better tongues than yours have been ripped from wiser mouths!"

"It matters little," muttered Yang Po-liang, looking at the man behind Lee as he spoke. "It is written that a quick tongue sharpens naught but a knife for its throat."

Again it looked as if he was about to go to sleep. He did not seem particularly interested in Lee. He seemed to be waiting for something and listening for it. He folded his little, wrinkled hands in his sleeves. Minutes passed in an ugly, ominous silence before the faint, whisper-like chime of a gong sounded somewhere among all the bowls and weird temple pieces there on the altar. Yang Po-liang moved then, moved as if he had long expected that sound. With his knuckles he stroked a shining brass gong at his left. A pleasing sound drifted off across the room. In answer to it, a tall slab of stone fully two feet thick, swung outward in the wall to Lee's right. A short, squatty-faced man in stout blue serge entered with a small black hat in his hand as the slab of stone immediately closed behind him.

A little inward start prickled Captain Lee as the man came forward. He was not a Chinaman. At a glance Lee saw that he was a Japanese, and then Lee thought of the Sacramento River scow, the one whose master had delivered the innocent-appearing note to one of the Japanese cruiser commanders. He thought of the description the master of the scow had given of the man who had hired him to take the note out to the cruisers. The man who had entered the room fitted that description like a cerain peg for a certain hole. In terms of the Secret Service, he was *there* from the squatty face to the sharp shiny eyes, the cut of his clothes, the shape of his hat, a certain tilt to the right side of his mouth and a flat, wart-like black mole well up on his forehead.

The man came on. He bowed to Yang Po-liang. Yang Po-liang leaned forward intently, and spoke to him in English.

"Well?"

"They come, yeesh!" the man smiled. "Even now they are in the bay, yeesh. Soon maybe you will hear."

"And, fellow," Yang Po-liang's eyes seemed to be burning like little coals of softly glowing fire, "they are in the bay!"

"Yeesh!" The Japanese laughed nervously. "And the bay is well covered with fog. They will not fail."

"Go now!" Yang Po-liang waved his hands. "Inform them in the outer passages to open wider the ventilators so we may hear it when it comes."

"Yeesh!"

The man bowed, and turned away. Yang Po-liang again knuckled his gong, sending its soft, silvery sound floating across the room. The wall opened. The Japanese was gone.

"Now," Yang Po-liang stirred, "bring in the woman!"

Holly Blunt appeared a few minutes later, walking through an opening in the wall to Captain Lee's left and followed by two stout-looking youths in plain robes of scarlet. Her hands were fastened behind her back. She walked with her head up, but her face was tired and drawn. She scarcely glanced at Lee. For some reason she seemed to be deliberately avoiding his gaze riveted upon her face. The youths halted her with a jerk in front of Yang Po-liang. They did something to her then that made her sink to her knees there on the floor.

Yang Po-liang spoke, leaning forward. "Well, pretty one," his voice almost carried a chuckle, "I am told that you refused to obey the order."

"I did!"

The girl had stumbled back to her feet. She was standing stiffly, her shoulders thrown back, but she was trembling, trembling almost violently. Lee saw the twitching of muscles in her bare arms that now seemed bloodless. Boiling with an ever-growing rage, he lay there, knowing his utter helplessness.

"And I am also told, fair one," Yang Po-liang was going on quietly, "that you claim to have never seen the man lying there behind you. Eh?" His voice lifted with that "Eh!" to a shrill, monkey-like squeak. "Is that true?"

Holly Blunt turned. She looked down, straight into Lee's eyes. Her lips moved, quivering. With a sudden shake of her head, she turned back to Yang Po-liang.

"I have never seen him before!" she lied. "I do not know him."

"Eh!" Again that monkey-squeak took charge of Yang Po-liang's voice. He leaned forward again, sharp little eyes as bright as pin-points. "So you are both a headstrong, pretty fool and a liar! A most remarkable liar! What can it bring you? Do you hope to save him by it?"

"I—I have never seen the man before," stammered the girl in a weaker voice. "Never."

"Yet," smiled the old man, now idly toying with his bony hands, "you came from your father's ship with him not many days ago. You were together, just the two of you, in the little cabin of your father's barge. You lunched together, just the two of you, in a little café off Market Street. Together you rode a cable-car to Russian Hill and California and Jones. Shall I tell you the number of times you kissed, just the two of you!" he lifted his finger, "in the hall of your father's house?"

"Oh, God!" cried the girl, suddenly turning and looking back at Lee. "They know everything, Andy! I—I thought I might help you in some way——"

"It's all right, Holly!" cried Lee. He tried to sit up, but a quick hand shot forward from behind him. It closed in his thick hair and jerked him back. "Keep your nerve, Holly! Don't mind me or anything that happens to me!"

"He still believes, perhaps," laughed a voice behind him, "that there are yet two of his comrades in the outer passages. Perhaps they are, but they will never find this place. Never!"

"Enough!" Yang Po-liang made a little *clack*-ing sound with his hands. "Here, we do not argue points. You will take them away, to the Fourth Vault. Thrust them in together. I will see them again only tonight. *At midnight!*" His tone had grown hard, sure and commanding as he spoke to some one behind Lee. "I will see them again from the iron lattice above the well. Naked they came into the world, naked out of it they will go! Enough! We will not mention them again. Take them away!"

Lee was snatched to his feet. It was then, for the first time, that he saw the face of the man who had spoken to him from behind. He looked bitterly at the man's long-sloping face, its glinty-black eyes, his high cheeks and the thin mustaches drooping away from the surly mouth.

It was then, also, that Lee again saw the giant with the noseless face and trimmed ears. The man was leaning with statuesque stillness against the wall. His arms were folded in his dirty rags of sleeves. He seemed only half-awake. Lee wondered how the monster had escaped or if he was but an exact mate to the one he had sent out of the labyrinth of sewers in charge of Stone and Macey.

"Move, white man!" a rough-shod foot kicked Lee from behind. "China has spoken!"

Side by side, he was marched across the room with Holly Blunt. Lee heard a chime-like sound behind them. It was followed by another. In a moment there were sounds of quick footsteps behind them. A man's voice cried out then, and it was decidedly a white man's voice.

"We are ready!" it was saying. "Listen! It will come in a minute, timed to a minute!"

It came then, a dull, low, double-rolling sound jarring the great room like an earthquake. The massive throne trembled. An altar bowl came banging down from its place, striking the stone floor at a spot not covered by a rug and making a hellish clattering.

"There! I told you!" cried the white man's voice again. "I knew what I was about when I told you to send to South America for the three vons! I—Listen!"

Another sound was coming, a rolling, rumbling shaking the room. Another altar bowl clattered on the floor.

Lee whirled, and looked back. It cost him a cruel, flat-handed blow across the mouth as the tall man with the thin mustaches struck him, but—even if it cost him his life on the spot—he had to see that white man behind him. And he did see him—a tall, thin man in gray tweeds and a soft fedora hat, waving excited arms in front of old Yang Po-liang.

It was a shock to Lee, a shock that drove through him like the blow of a knife cutting him to the very marrow.

The tall man was none other than Dr. Rodin Lafferty, surgeon extraordinary of Police Headquarters!

"What—what were those sounds?" cried Holly as they were being roughly shoved into an opening in the wall. "What ——"

The white man behind them answered the question as he again spoke in his high voice to Yang Po-liang.

"Three direct hits!" he was screeching. "You can bet your life on it! Give them just a few minutes more and you will hear the Japs open fire. Give it three seconds after that—and you will hear old Blunt and feel him shaking half the city down as he starts letting go his broadsides!"

CHAPTER XVII

"HORSE-JAW JACK"

PROGRESS! That was what Old Eternity Bill Mandell had called it after Buck Stone and Dick Macey had come up through the man-hole with their huge prisoner. *Progress!* Ponies beginning to trot! Mandell had chuckled and rubbed his huge paunch and hands, and had promptly sent his prisoner off for Police Headquarters in charge of burly, black-eyed Frank Tracey.

"Tell 'em nothing down there yet, Frank," he had ordered. "Just tell 'em who he is, to lock him up in a good, stout cell, and that you picked him up—oh, tell 'em I picked him up and we'll be down later. They've got his picture on file, anyway."

Progress! One always progressed if they kept their heads about them. With Tracey gone with his prisoner and Stone and Macey having returned to the sewer, Mandell had called in Joe Dalton from the little garden in the rear of the house. Leaving Dalton to watch the man-hole, Mandell barged off upstairs to raid the kitchen for "physical stimulation."

The refrigerator was almost empty. There was little use of food in the house with Holly gone, Mrs. Blunt in the hospital, and Admiral Blunt forced to spend almost all his time aboard his ship because of the ever-talked threats of war. Mandell found beer enough, and there were a couple of boiled eggs, some cold potatoes, a bowl of rice and a dish of tapioca pudding. He finished the lot, washing it down with copious draughts of beer. Still hungry, he found a pound-tin of corned beef in a cupboard above the drainboard of the sink. It was yet not enough of "solids," but he filled himself with beer, wiped his mouth on the end of a white apron hanging on the thumb-latch of the ironing board locker, and wheezed back downstairs to the basement to find Dalton pacing the floor impatiently.

"Look here, Eternity," Dalton had growled at him, "I'm thinking that we're taking too many things for granted in leaving it all up to just three men to inspect that sewer."

"What would a crowd do but spoil it all?" Mandell had half-chuckled. "Andy Lee's one of the best men we could find for that business. Too many cooks spoil the cake, you know. Doesn't it seem logical enough to you that a gang stamping up and down the sewers could do little more than make a hell of a lot of racket and advertise the fact that we've at last struck ourselves a scent of a trail? Wait for Andy. Give the boy his chance. Maybe he'll want the whole

San Francisco Police Department to help us before he's through. But now—patience."

Patience! By all means *patience*. It was his watchword, his slogan, the clock by which he regulated his very life. He knew his business. That was why the government kept him; why he could let Washington rant and storm with one brain-fit after another. Washington knew. So often had he told them back there that horse-sense was all a man needed—horse-sense and patience. A man could not stroll to a crime and pluck the guts of its secret right out of the air. If there were no clues, one waited and watched and listened. Sometimes one had to wait a year or two, but the government paid the bills, and the Secret Service always managed to get its man.

Like Kai Dai, the giant. Up for life, and then escape. And now back in jail. They would fix him this time. Fort Leavenworth would know what to do. Should have hanged the devil in the first place! Yet Kai Dai might come in handy now. Yes, he might be induced to talk a little.

Mandell thought a lot about Kai Dai and just how he was going to handle that Chink as he paced slowly back and forth there in that basement with the chill fog lying like dirty-gray wool against the windows and the deep *rarr-ah-barr-zumph* of the fog-horn of Mile House Light braying in the distance. He was still pacing when a police car roared up out front and came to a halt with a loud, wailing shriek of brakes.

Feet tramped heavily along the alley. There was a mumble of voices outside. It was followed by a hard fist pounding on the basement door.

Mandell opened the door with a frown. He knew that knock. In San Francisco, Seattle, Birmingham, Alabama, or New York it would have been the same. All police knocked alike—hard and loud. Woke up the whole cock-eyed neighborhood.

The man at the door was Captain Shade,—"Horse-Jaw Jack" the underworld called him. About fifty, he was a tall man with a sort of patent-leather mustache and a long, gaunt face.

"Sorry to butt-in on you, Mandell." He spoke in a low tone. "Of course we've known all along that you fellows were keeping a spot on the house. We were, too, until we saw what a thorough job you were doing, then we pulled out to let you have a free hand. I came to tell you about Tracey."

"Yes, what about him?"

"He's dead."

"Dead!" Mandell's voice was a gasp. "Why—why, man ——"

"Found about an hour ago," the police officer was going on. "Only about three blocks from here ——"

"My Gawd!"

"—and, from the looks of his body, a gorilla must have mauled him. Right arm was broken at the elbow and dislocated at the shoulder. Looked like he'd been handled by a bear. His neck was broken and his face torn ——"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Mandell, "what next! What next in this hell-fired thing!"

"He was lying thrown against a lamp-post and his head in the gutter," Captain Shade was going on. "Not much foot-travel up and down California Street, you know. Some people on a passing cable-car saw the body lying there and called Headquarters."

Mandell groaned again. He had just finished telling Captain Shade of Kai Dai when Buck Stone and Dick Macey came out of the man-hole in a fever of excitement.

"Andy's gone!" blurted Macey. "We heard a shot. Just one shot, then an awful noise like a braying. We went toward it, down a branch sewer that looked caved-in to us. We found that it wasn't completely. We climbed over a pile of fallen-in stone and bricks, and came to a basement ——"

"Not exactly a basement," cut in Stone, eager to add something to the story, "but a place that looked like one ——"

"And found a pool of blood!" rushed on Macey, not going to allow himself to be cut off from finishing his story. "Regular pool of it ——"

"Oh, my!" groaned Mandell. "Oh, my!"

"There's a place beyond the blood," Macey was going on, "that is boarded up with heavy planks and timbers. It looks like it has a door in the center of it ——"

"Of the usual Chinese gambling house or opium den type!" shot in Stone. "That means reinforced in every way, and the only way through it is with axes and crow-bars."

"And you're going to just have to have the police now, Mandell!" Captain Shade's tone actually carried a note of triumph. "We have all the equipment, you know, to handle such doors and go through places where the going is tough. In fact, Mandell, we're extra good in things like that."

"And in noise, yes!" A sneer wrinkled Old Eternity Bill's face. Jealousy, too often rampant among the men who enforce the law, was popping to the surface. It had been in that note of triumph in Shade's voice. It was written in Mandell's face as dark and scowling as printer's "job-black" ink. "Noise and your damned names in the papers!"

"No more than you damned Fed's!" snapped the captain. "All right, Brail!" He turned speaking to a uniformed sergeant who had appeared in the fog-riddled darkness behind him. "Get Headquarters. Tell 'em to send the Raid Squad. Might ask for a half-dozen detectives ——"

"And be sure," put in Mandell, pointedly, the sneer still on his face, "to call up all the newspapers in town and have them send their reporters. And, oh, yes, Horse-Jaw Jack," his voice was lifting, "whatever you do, don't forget the cameramen. Your picture looks so hell-fired well in the papers!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THUNDER IN THE BAY

AND the police came again to Russian Hill. First it was a big sedan filled with detectives. A few minutes behind it followed a patrol wagon loaded with the Raiding Squad—eight patrolmen and a sergeant, all of them armed with pick-axes, pinch-bars and even tear-gas bombs. Behind them roared the cars of reporters and cameramen—sharp-eyed, sharp-nosed bloodhounds, every one of them, on the fresh trail of something new and startling. News! Always news! It was their life, their wine!

Lights burned in the basement of the Blunt house now. Soon they were burning on the main floor. Flashlight "guns" filled the basement with smoke. An old man-hole was breaking into print.

And Old Eternity Bill Mandell could not get through that hole. He watched officer after officer go down into it with a powerful flashlight. Man after man disappeared. An old general deserted and left completely behind, he paced the basement floor or stood for long intervals and stared with owlish eyes at that infernal man-hole. At last, in speechless desperation, he shucked off his clothing. A pasty-white elephant, blowing and grunting, he tried the hole again. It was like pulling teeth. He forced the lower part of his body through, but his arms and shoulders stopped him. There he stood until another car-load of reporters and cameramen arived. A flashlight gun did the rest. With Old Eternity Bill arguing, the cameramen "shot" him. It was too much. Mandell threw up his hands in holy horror and roared like an old walrus in a trap. The roar and the throwing up of his hands did the rest. His feet slid off the steps of the ladder, and skinning his back and shoulders, he dropped into the sewer—in the darned thing at last!

"Now throw me down my clothes!" he bawled. "And if you ducks put that picture in your papers, I'll sue the whole hell-fired works for libel!"

The sewers were alive with officers by this time. Powerful flashlights filled that old underground world with their sweeping rays. Pinch-bars tapped the old walls. Hornets working madly before a coming storm could not have been busier than the Raid Squad.

Dressed again, Mandell shuffled along with his flashlight in his big right hand. He went down the rusty iron ladder with it squeaking and trembling from his weight. The reverberating sound of ripping and breaking wood finally came to him. A burly Irish patrolman told him where it was coming from.

"But, faith, my friend," the officer grinned, "you'll never get there this way with a belly on you like that! Not enough room. Come along. I'll show you another way we've found."

He led the way down a slope until they came to a place where a few bricks and stones had been pried out of a wall. A panel-like square stood open in the wall. The Irishman grinned again.

"Devilish clever, I'd say, Mr. Mandell," he explained. "We would never have found it without our pinch-bars. Faith, but they're the Holy Father's blessing in a place like this!"

Mandell hurried through the opening. He was in a planked-up tunnel now. Soon he was at a place where Stone and Macey were at work with a half-dozen officers and tearing their way into a thick-planked wall. Newspaper reporters were beyond them, waiting. Cameramen had already made pictures, for a low, grayish smoke still clung to the dark ceiling overhead. Captain Shade detached himself from the newspaper group and came forward.

"Keep clear of that mess there," he warned, flashing his light to an ugly-red smear on the floor. "I've already had it photographed and a sample of the stuff taken up in a bottle. Looks bad for somebody. I hope it's not from your Captain Lee, Mandell. The loss of two in one night might go hard on you in Washington, old fellow."

"I'm not worried about Washington," growled Mandell. "What have you found here?"

"A room beyond that wall," explained Shade, toying with his mustache. "The very devil to get into. A Chink job from start to finish. Couldn't possibly be anything else; and you know how they build—wood, iron, wire and steel, then the same thing over and over until they have a wall or a door that would balk the devil, himself. I'll bet this place has stood here for thirty or forty years."

But the police and Stone and Macey had a hole through the wall a few minutes later. The first thing their flashlights revealed was the framed print of the Emperor of Japan looking at them with calm dignity from the wall.

"Missed my guess completely!" exclaimed Captain Shade. "It's Japs after all! No Chink would let that picture hang on his wall thirty seconds. Not after the Shanghai slaughter! We might have known that ——"

"Now all you birds wait a minute!" cut in Mandell. "Don't go ranting a lot of fool talk for the newspapers. This is a serious thing, Shade. Mighty serious, if you will only realize it. That picture was put there on the wall for its own little part in a certain little play."

It forced his hand to explain more than he wanted to explain when they had finished searching the room for finger-prints and other clues and Shade had allowed the newspaper men to come in.

"This stuff positively must not go into the papers, boys," pleaded Mandell. "You fellows have a part to play in this thing. You've got the country to think about. We're fighting to keep down a war. That picture in the papers and the stories you can write with a little imagination would set fire to the coat-tails of the country."

The reporters and cameramen agreed with him at last. To a man, they agreed to leave the picture out of their papers and to make no mention of it in their copy.

"You're doing a lot for your Uncle Sam, boys," Mandell told them, "more than I can tell you!"

"We might do even more if we were taken a little closer into your confidence." A dark-haired cameraman spoke. "Newspaper men have helped the government many times in such things."

"I know, I know, boys," Mandell agreed, "but don't blame an old bat for being so shy. A man gets fooled a lot in forty years of playing this game."

But the room told them nothing. The chest against the wall and the badly rumpled pallet with its little wooden Japanese pillow told them not a thing. There was no blood on the floor to show that the victim who had left the pool in the tunnel had been brought into or carried out of the room.

Only the pinch-bars and pick-axes of the Raid Squad promised other developments. In cutting ruthlessly through the walls, they opened the way to a flight of stairs, and the stairs led up into a huge, ramshackled old wooden building filled with lumber. Here, everything in the shape of something tangible to go ahead with seemed to come to an end.

"Same old story, Mandell." Captain Shade laughed softly as they stood there in the midst of huge stacks of lumber and played the bright rays of their flashlights to the right and left, overhead and underfoot. "A beginning to prick your interest, then a complete fade-out of everything. I've met that so often in this part of the city I'm getting to expect it."

"We're not through yet, Shade." Mandell looked at his watch. "It'll be getting daylight in an hour or so. But we're going to stay with this thing, Shade. At least, I will—and my boys will stay with me. I'm gutting your Chinatown wide open or finding what I'm after. To tell you the natural born truth, my whole job for the present is Chinatown. Nothing but Chinatown! I'll sleep in this infernal building or in the street if I have to, but I'll find Andy Lee. When I find Andy, I feel sure that I'll find Holly Blunt and the hellions I want who are behind all this dirty work."

"The police will be with you as long as you want ——"

Two rumbling, tumbling and tossing sounds, coming almost as one, cut Captain Shade short. They came from the direction of the bay where the restless madhouse of morning traffic had come to life at its regular hour with the noisy swirl of propellers and the groaning lament of the whistles of a dozen big ferry-boats in the fog.

They were tremendous blasts. The earth shook. Lumber rattled like clattering bones in the old building. Window glass could be heard raining down in the narrow, cobblestoned alleys running along either side of the building.

"Lord of hosts!" exclaimed a reporter who had just come up behind Mandell and Shade. "What is that?"

There was no time for an answer. A third explosion shook the old building. More glass was heard splattering on the cobblestones outside. From the direction of the bay now came a rapid wailing of coarse whistles from the ferries and a gone-mad shrilling and tooting of the sharper whistles of smaller craft. It was as though an army of devils had suddenly popped up in San Francisco Bay and were trying to shriek and wail the skies down.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEN

NO MORE sounds of explosions came to Captain Lee and Holly Blunt as they marched down a long, narrow tunnel that was smoothly walled, ceiled and floored with concrete. Two old, old men who bobbed along like monkeys shaking with palsy had appeared in front of them with lanterns. They kept their distance of a couple of yards in front of Lee and the girl until they came to a low, den-like opening where a thick slab of stone stood ajar as a door. The mustached man shoved Lee into it, but he caught Holly Blunt by the arm, halting her and turning her quickly to face him.

"Little flower," he told her in his intoning voice, "what a most inglorious fool you have been this night! Only the gods could save you now. The old man of the throne has spoken. His word is the law, a law that even I, who am next in power here, would never dare to question. Around the world our temples of Yama are scattered, and around the world men obey Yang Po-liang. There is but one man higher in power, and that man, little pale flower, is my aged and most honorable father, the Heavenly Master of the Throne of Gold, which is the first temple of Yama, located in the Yunling mountain passes in the north of the province of Szechuan. But even my ancient and most honorable father would not lift one sacred finger or whisper a word from his precious mouth to change the decree of any temple unless, my little one, it happened to be a decree that violated some law of the old gods. Such decrees, you may be certain, do not often come. Not once in every two hundred and fifty years! For it is written, jewel of the stars, that even our most sacred Heavenly Master cannot tamper with the laws—and live.

"Why do I tell you all this, fair one?" His lips curled, his left hand lifting to rest itself on the jewel-sparkling hilt of the curving blade half-hidden in his robes. "So that you may know the power here to which all animated things in contact with us must bow a humbled head. So, little one, if an opportunity of life comes to you again, something which I am sorely moved to doubt, grasp it in your lovely white arms, hold to it as you would cling to the bosom of your gods, for even your writings say it has winged feet, that it knocks upon your door but once, then it is gone upon the winds to return no more. And now," he bowed with an air of profound humility, "I bid you, my rose of heaven, good-bye until a quarter to the hour of twelve tonight."

He was gone then, striding softly away with his robes making the rustling sound of wings.

The two old men with the lanterns had twice thrust Lee back into the den-like opening when he had tried to come out of it. One of the men now seized Holly Blunt by the arm, turning her toward the opening. She moved as if in a daze. Her eyes were starry, her lips bloodless and dry. Thrust rudely into the dark hole, she staggered and collided against Captain Lee. The stone slab behind her was pushed in place, leaving them there in the bitter-black darkness of a low, evil-smelling tomb.

"It's all right, Holly!" Lee was trying to soothe her as she leaned there against him with her body trembling and her breath like a fever against his throat. "It's all right, darling. I can't begin to tell you how it hurts me to see you like this. But something will come to aid us. Eternity Bill is on the job. He won't fail us, Holly. He *can't fail us!*"

"It—it's all right, Andy, yes!" Her voice jerked as if gasping for both breath and words. "Nothing—nothing can last forever. I—I will be glad when it—when it is done!"

"But we're not through yet, Holly," he lowered his voice to a whisper and kept on, desperately. "Please know that we are *not yet through,* darling. Know that Eternity Bill now has a lead. Know that he will get action enough from Washington to call out the Army if he needs it. He'll tear this town down. He'll bring your father into it before he is done. All along he has kept the admiral in the dark as much as possible to soothe his fears. He will go to him now with everything, and you know what Beauregard Blunt will do."

"Only he may be too late, Andy." She was fighting to hold back a wild fit of sobbing. "It—it's awful here, Andy."

"Please, please know that we are not deserted," he kept pleading. "We are not. I tell you, darling, that Old Eternity Bill has a lead to follow now, *something he can tear apart* ——"

"They took Wu's body away," she cut in, speaking as if she had not heard him and was mumbling in a restless sleep. "They said you had killed him. They wrapped his head in a big, coarse blanket, and carried him up in a dark old place filled with lumber. They carried you and me along. They had a blanket over your head. They carried me with my hands behind me and a big handkerchief tied over my mouth. We went out of the place where the lumber was stacked. We crossed an alley—to—to another dark old building. We went a long way, through two or three old buildings, before we stopped on a platform of some kind and were lowered deep in the ground. And—and then I was kept waiting while they carried you on ——"

"Don't talk of it, Holly," he whispered. "Don't. It only hurts you."

"Nothing can hurt me any more, Andy."

"Keep your nerve!" How he wanted to take her in his arms! How he wanted to hold her tightly against his bosom and comfort her! "You must keep your nerve."

"Andy," by the feel of her breath he knew she was looking up, trying to see his face in the dead-black darkness, "you poor, poor fellow, you do not know what we are doomed to meet at midnight!"

"I probably didn't quite understand what the old blister at the throne meant," he told her quietly, "but it must be something pretty hellish. He was a little vague ——"

"Hell would be sweet compared to it!" she cut in, murmuringly. "You—you see, Andy, I—I have already seen the thing we must face. It's going to be maddening—starved octopi, mad for blood and flesh and coming—coming out of a well with sea-water in the bottom to keep them alive!" Her voice was rising hysterically. "Coming! Trained by hunger to come, to leave the water! Rising up like old stumps thrusting themselves out of the ground by their roots! Oh! *Oh!* I—I know I can't, *can't* stand it, Andy! *Oh-o-o-o!*"

Her voice was suddenly dying. She was falling, going down to the concrete floor. Lee tried to catch her with his knees. He did break her fall somewhat, but in spite of it she fell heavily, and when he hastily dropped beside her, he cried out hoarsely, so certain was he that she had dropped dead there in that filthy den.

CHAPTER XX

THE WAY OF UNCLE SAM

CAPTAIN SHADE telephoned Headquarters, but it was not until extras came on the streets just after daylight that Old Eternity Bill Mandell and the men at work with him were given a painfully complete account of the early-morning explosions.

Another ship had been torpedoed, and this time the reckless-mad hellions behind the work had sunk their victim right in San Francisco Bay.

No one, the papers said, had seen the mysterious submarine. The darkness and the pea-soup fog had been too heavy for that. The explosions had come right at the time when the bay was stirring from one side to the other with early traffic. The old army of fishing-boats were heading out to the Pacific, and, covered by all the noise, the submarine had discharged three torpedoes—and had "streaked" it for the open sea.

"Only insane courage," commented one of the papers, "could have accomplished this shocking, dreadful tragedy, which came right under our very noses and with a desperation that rivals anything that happened during the World War. . . ."

"Sheer madness!" declared a front-page editorial of another extra. "Only sheer madness! By far more brutal and reckless than anything that happened during the late war. Here in the bay, under the very eyes of two American dreadnaughts, three Japanese cruisers, and one of our U. S. Coast Guard cutters lying at her wharf, the tragedy was done, like a burglar successfully accomplishing the robbery of a penitentiary with all the guards awake and alert at their posts. . . ."

But even battleships, cruisers and coast guard cutters are blind in a fog, and their submarine telephones were useless in a bay teeming with craft and the whirling and churning of their propellers. So many whirling propellers only made so much noise. It was not like a ship being out on a quiet sea with even her own engines halted while her officers listened for the enemy.

And the fog had undoubtedly played its own ghastly joke on the submarine. For the submarine's murder-crazed commanders had, without a doubt, intended to blow one of the Japanese cruisers out of the water. The cruiser had been lying there at a certain point off Angel Island until just before midnight, and at midnight it had sailed. Less than two hours later, the big, gray *S.S. Davey Clarkson,* a cumbersome old American freighter from the Atlantic Coast, had let go her anchors in almost the exact spot vacated by the Japanese man-of-war. And the *S.S. Davey Clarkson* had received the full charges of three torpedoes. Two had struck her almost exactly amidships. The third had landed further aft. Loaded to her water-line with a cargo of steel, the ship had rolled over like a death-stricken animal, and had plunged to the bottom of the bay, taking almost all her crew and officers with her and leaving the others dazed and trying to swim in the cold water.

Within two hours after the sinking of the *S.S. Davey Clarkson,* American cruisers and ships of the Coast Guard were frantically searching the Pacific Coast again. This time the search was being concentrated in the vicinity of San Francisco. Smaller ships kept a vigilant watch over the Golden Gate. A squad of airplanes was sent out, but the heavy fog that stretched like a dark blanket from California to far out to sea rendered them as hopeless as blind men playing tag on the roof of the world; and the government ships below were no better. They were all blind, helplessly blind, and burning good coal and oil for—nothing!

Yet Old Eternity Bill Mandell swore by all that was holy that he was progressing. Beaten at every hand, yet never for a moment willing to admit it, he spent the entire morning in his slow, snail-like search. The old sewers had been gone over inch-by-inch at one o'clock. More and more men had been pressed into service. Mandell drew a few of them from the Federal Building. He received the others from Headquarters. At two o'clock Admiral Blunt came to his aid, backed by two hundred and fifty men and officers from the *Colorado*. Within twenty minutes after they arrived, a like number of men and officers appeared in the streets of Chinatown from the *Arizona.*

"We're going through this thing, admiral!" declared Mandell. "Through it, top and bottom! I know I'm on my trail at last, and when I know a thing, I push it to the limit."

And they "pushed." Uncle Sam was "on the job" and on it with all his vim at last. Property rights were ignored. A dozen times during the afternoon swarms of shyster lawyers appeared on the scene with this injunction and that, but they were not dealing with a police department whose hands could be tied by politicians and bandy-legged judges. Certain judges did set up their usual howl and signed many long and painfully worded documents about states rights, but it did them not a whit of good. Mandell and Blunt ignored every order, and for once Washington kept silent to constant streams of telegrams pouring eastward with complaint after complaint that declared the Constitutional Rights of the golden State of California were being ravished and murdered in cold-blood.

For Old Eternity Bill and Admiral Beauregard Blunt were going *through* Chinatown with the ruthlessness of cannon-balls splattering holes in the roofs of shingled houses. Brawny blue-jackets had roped off the streets. Business, the warm blood of any Chinaman's heart, had been shot to glory. To the utter terror of certain officials of the city in charge of this and that, sewer lines were being dug into, their walls threatened, and here and there a sewer did give away from the endless poundings; and at one place a street caved-in, leaving a hole in the middle of it large enough to bury a whale.

The police were taken out of it. The shyster lawyers and judges who would listen to them had scored there, but it made not a particle of difference to Admiral Blunt and Old Eternity Bill.

Blue-jackets, backed with Federal men, were digging into the very walls of houses. They were at the work rough-shod, making a great deal of noise and doing endless damage, for sailormen are not prone to handle a task with silk gloves.

The long day came to an end. Darkness settled, with the fog thickening. For once Old Eternity Bill had forgotten all about his "physical stimulation" and had not had a thing for the incredible maw of his huge stomach since his raid on Admiral Blunt's refrigerator. He was on a job that needed push and he was a man who knew how to get the work done.

Eight o'clock came. Nine. Ten. Men were getting tired. They had pulled and pushed, dug and shovelled until their limbs and backs were threatening to crack under the strain.

Old Eternity Bill at last sat on a garbage can in a narrow alley and cursed. Admiral Blunt found him there. He spoke to Mandell in a tired voice.

"Well, Goliath, we've raised a lot of hell, and it doesn't look as if we're getting anywhere."

"We've only started, admiral, we've only started!" Mandell's tone was brusk, yet, behind it, deep weariness was lurking. "Nothing's going to stop me—unless you lay down on me. If you do I'll beg soldiers from the commanding officer of the Presidio. I won't quit ——"

"And I am not in the habit of it!" There was a growl of impatience in the admiral's tone. "There are men enough aboard our two ships in the bay to damned near eat your Chinatown, and I'll stick with you if it costs me a general court martial and my buttons."

Eleven o'clock came. Every stick of lumber in the old ramshackle building in front of Mandell had been removed. Long, ungainly piles of it lay in the alley beyond the building. Though the men had actually dug out every foot of the building's rotted floor, it had told them not a thing more than they had known at the start.

Swarms of men were still working in three other old buildings. At eleven-thirty—right when every man except Mandell and Blunt was sick of the job—they were rewarded.

Admiral Blunt was perched on a garbage can there beside Mandell when a short, ruddy-faced ensign found them. Wearing regulation blue and a canvas belt and a .45 Colt automatic pistol strapped to his right leg, the man was in a fever of excitement.

"We've found something, sir!" He saluted Blunt stiffly. "The old building we've been working in, the one with all the old barrels and bales of cured hides—well, sir—well, sir," his excitement was growing in leaps and bounds, "in chopping through the floor and the walls we have discovered a secret shaft. It—it's a bit like an elevator platform, sir! Goes right down in the ground! Like a square well, sir, only we can see an iron-bound door at the bottom of it, sir!"

CHAPTER XXI

"LIFE!"

FOR a long time, so long that Captain Lee felt that she would never return to consciousness, Holly Blunt lay there on the hard concrete floor. Lee did the best he could to straighten her limp figure. Lying on the floor beside her, he moved her legs with his legs, straightening them so that her cramped position would not completely shut off the circulation of her blood.

She lay face-forward, rolled a little to one side and resting more against her right shoulder than her left. Down there on the floor with her, Lee worked himself around until his right shoulder was against her left hip. He leaned over her, feeling along her arm with his face and mouth until he came to her wrists and the several turns of quarter-inch window-sash cord that bound them securely together. He examined the cord carefully. Whoever placed the binding on the girl's wrists had done a thorough job of it. By the very feel of Holly's hands with his lips, Lee could tell that they were rigid from the shut-off circulation of the blood. Like his own hands as well as his arms, Holly Blunt's hands had simply become deadened. They were like senseless stumps of flesh.

Lee kept feeling about over the girl's hands and wrists with his face and lips. The quarter-inch cord seemed as hard as a chain. The knots with which it had been tied were not ordinary knots. They were tied in a manner that made them only tighten if one attempted to untie them. Lee was still examining them when the girl stirred with a low moan.

He all but hated it when she had returned to consciousness. It only returned her, he knew, to the realization of her awful misery. For several minutes she lay there sobbing softly, trying to hold herself. He knew the struggle she was going through, and it only hurt him all the more as he tried, like one dying man attempting to sympathize with another, to comfort her.

Woman-like—with that ever gallant fighting spirit that had made woman the goddess-supreme and the queen of courage and sympathy mother-comforter of all the earth—she was trying to console him a short time later.

"You are a nice boy, Andy," she told him, and he knew by the sound of her voice that she was actually smiling at him there in the bitter-black darkness. "You know what I told you about the cavalry."

"You are a jewel, Holly!"

"Oh, yes, Andy, even the Chink with the funny mustaches told me that!"

Her voice carried a pinch of its old child-like carelessness. He could have sworn that she was doing her best to laugh. But behind it there was an awful hopelessness, something that could not quite be stilled, something hidden, yet stirring and struggling for voice. It was shadowed with a shade too much irony to be real. It was too much like a condemned man smiling on his way to the electric chair, the hangman's noose or the guillotine.

"He said a lot of things, Andy," she was going on, still fighting, still making an alarmingly daring battle to be a little of the care-free girl in green that he had met aboard a grim old ship of war lying in the middle of San Francisco Bay. "He really imagines himself quite a Romeo. Of course he was playing his lute to my vanity, knowing that all women, like children, are fond of flattery and are more easily talked to with soft words than with a knout."

She was silent for a few moments, just lying there on her side. She went on talking then. Minutes passed. She was still at it. She frightened him. For a few minutes he thought that she was going mad. She was too much like a fighter getting up to sing a song after being repeatedly mauled, kicked and hammered and battered into insensibility.

But she was not mad. She was not going mad. It came to him that she was talking to keep from going mad. She told him of everything that had happened to her from the time he had left her on Russian Hill until the crash of his shot had sounded outside the heavy panel-door of the little underground room. As she went on and on, it came to him that she was telling it as some ghastly horror tale and not as a narrative of what had actually happened to her.

"Mother of God!" his innermost thoughts kept crying, "what a woman!"

When she finished they lay there in silence for a long time. It was so still they could hear their hearts beating. The air that came to them seemed half-muddy, stale. Lee finally got up, feeling his way along the walls with his shoulders.

The place was no more than seven feet long and six feet wide. As far as he could discover there were no cracks in the walls. It was exactly like a vault in some old family mausoleum where caskets are placed in double tiers with a narrow walkway left between.

Lee moved back to Holly. She had moved, sliding and twisting along the floor until her back was to the wall. He sat down beside her, and leaned close to her. With his voice lowered to a faint whisper, he spoke.

"The air we get comes to us through a round hole as high as my chin. There is a chance that some one is at the other end of that hole listening to everything we say. Not that it would matter in the least to these yellow devils. It really wouldn't. They feel that we are no more than a couple of fat pigs in a pen. We are scarcely more than that; yet we are not through as long as we won't admit it to ourselves. I'm going to get those cords off you, Holly. It's going to be a devil of a job. You will have to lie on your face. My hands are dead. No feeling left in them. Besides, we are both tied so that we couldn't use our fingers to try to release each other if our hands were not as dead as wood. I'm going to chew through your cords. Be ready if anybody comes to sit up quickly and get your back to the wall."

Two minutes later he was at work. The work was infernally slow, for the cords seemed like wire. At the end of thirty minutes he had succeeded in gnawing through but one of them. A faint sound of moving feet halted him. He rolled to one side with a whisper of warning to Holly. When the stone slab opened in the wall he was lying against the opposite wall and pretending to be in a daze.

Carrying a small, brass lantern and stooping low as he came through the den-like opening in the wall, Dr. Rodin Lafferty entered the vault. Behind him, also carrying lanterns, were three men. Lee recognized two of them as the old, old men of the tunnel-like passage. The third was the tall fellow with the long mustaches. He followed Lafferty into the vault.

There was something sloth-like and specter-like about Rodin Lafferty as he stood there slowly straightening and lifting his lantern. That lifting light, coming up so slowly, did queer things to him. For a few short seconds he was not a man; he was an apparition, an evil phenomenon with stark-staring black holes for eyes, a long face with quivering nostrils and a pair of curling lips. Lee thought of a fiend in the true sense. It seemed that Lafferty's face had shrunken, thinned and drawn until it was no longer the face of a man. He was like a ghoul blown out of shape through a briar thicket by a harsh wind. But as the light grew higher, moving as if inch-by-inch, his enormous horn rims took shape. The two dark holes became two dark eyes, each a cold, glinting orb of intensity and each appearing to try and out-do the other in its aliveness of a curiosity as leering as a basilisk. He laughed, suddenly, and the laughter was hollow. It was like the hysterical laugh of a half-witted thief caught with his hand in a policeman's pocket. He spoke, and there was a fight behind his tone to master his courage.

"Well, Captain Lee, and you also Miss Blunt," he bowed to Holly, "it's—er—a trifle embarrassing, to say the least, isn't it? You never expected to see me here, and—er—quite frankly, I never intended that you should. Perhaps I like the—er—the true villain complex!" He laughed a downright funny little laugh. "My embarrassment darned near gets the best of me. Yet," he cleared his throat hackingly, and his voice steadied, "I told myself and Mr. Whang Sut Soon, the gentleman here behind me, that I would come to see you. Another might have ducked it—er—being unable to face the music, you might say."

And then he laughed again. It was still the laugh of a man fighting with himself for the courage to overthrow his embarrassment.

Captain Lee understood it. He could not help understanding it. In front of him was a man of culture and a certain social position. To say the least, he was no common gutter snipe. He was a man of intelligence, with a definite place in life, and pride. It was his pride that was gnawing at his vitals. There he stood with the mask of respectability shorn from his face. He had been caught red-handed like a common whippersnapper and the pill was a galling one to swallow. To encourage him, Captain Lee spoke to him quietly.

"It's all right, doctor. I have learned through the master teacher, Experience, that there are many games that mankind plays. I seem to have blundered in—or, rather, it was you who blundered in on me—on one of your games."

"Thank you, captain!" Lafferty actually bowed with relief. "You begin like a man who can talk sense in a pinch. I would greatly appreciate your indulgence in allowing me to do the same thing. May I?"

"I haven't a thing to do other than listen to you, doctor."

"Thank you again, captain!" and again Lafferty bowed. "I will be brief. First, allow me to assure you that I am honestly sorry to see you here. I am especially sorry for Miss Blunt. She is a most beautiful girl. Sex attraction, if nothing else, would draw heavily on my sympathy, little as I may seem to have. Call it the animal in the blood of mankind or plain brute or plain lust. No matter. You and the lady are here. Your plight is a terrible one. No other word would describe it. And I am in the pay of the people who have you here and hold your lives in their hands. I deem it unnecessary to remind you that you both have been condemned to die within a few hours. Miss Blunt knows that these people do not squirm at the sight of blood. They do not squirm at the idea of blending terror with death as a touch of added bitterness to the cup.

"To the Westerner," he cleared his throat, "this is, without a shadow of doubt, a most inhuman thing; yet it is not so in a true sense. The people here have long had to deal with people who have no fear of the stupid, nonsensically simple little business of merely dying. For the sake of results, they found themselves forced to add the extra frills.

"It should not be at all difficult for the white man to understand it. We are barbarians, ourselves. Our own stupid customs are surely cruel. In France they clip off people's heads with an axe. In England they hang as well as here. Only," he smiled, "we have gone the jolly Britisher a few tricks better. We kill some of our people with electric chairs, some in gas chambers. In the devoutly religious state of Utah, I am told, they are ironical enough to give a man or a woman the exceedingly delightful pleasure of choosing between the rope and a firing-squad. In other words, it is a polite way of asking the victim, 'Shall I hang you like a cow or shoot you like a crow?' "

"Very well, doctor," nodded Lee, impatiently. "May I ask if all this is leading up to any particular thing you have to say to us?"

"It has!" It looked as if quick, hot sparks would leap from the doctor's eyes. "Old man Mandell is working his head off somewhere above us, trying to find you. It is later in the morning than you realize. There is no use, however, in going into detail. A plan of ours miscarried this morning on account of the accursed fog and I am here to offer you an opportunity to save your life and the life of that beautiful creature there beside you. *Life!"* His voice lifted into a shout. *"Life!"* He stretched out his left hand, opening and closing it like a claw. "Life! Your life and the life of that rounded bosomed, rounded hipped creature there beside you. I hold it—your life and her life—in the hollow of my hand!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE PROPOSITION

"THINK, fools, *think!*" Dr. Rodin Lafferty was rushing on. His eyes were wide and wild, their darkness sheening in the little brass lantern's light—that little lantern he was swinging so crazily. *"Think,* I tell you. It is something we fool Americans never do if we can get out of it. We realize, of course, that it does very little good in most cases. This is a country where every idiot and his brother twenty-one years old goes to the polls and votes to make our laws and all our rot. Those of us with a smattering of intelligence know that our politicians are but the scum of the cesspools of our lowest quarter, and that only makes this thing called patriotism a song of those who know no better or those who want something from a gullible public's hands! It is a stupid thing for you to hold back. Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!" His voice was soaring away in a frenzy of shouting again. "Call me what you want to call me for the thing I am doing, for the connection I have made with these men. It was opportunity—an opportunity to reach out and seize something, to lift myself from a mediocre salary of so much a month. An opportunity to quit drudgery! Money! By God, I accepted it. If our feet slip and I die for it I will not be sorry. For all men die, some young and some old, some in the poor house and some in the banking house. The wise man takes it when he can. The fool sits back and talks of patriotism! *Bah!* Patriotism, the lowing of the cattle and the grunting of the swine! Fools, I am here to offer you life—and even riches if you care to follow me."

His voice broke into a wild cackling of laughter. Captain Lee and Holly Blunt were seeing the inner side of Dr. Rodin Lafferty now. All the enamel was off of him. He was what he was, not the efficient, quick-as-a-wink surgeon of Police Headquarters, not the man of the city every day breaking into the headlines. He was a money-hungry monster, a lustful imp for the power it would bring him.

"Look, Lee, and hear me out." His voice dropped. For a moment he was like a man who had been raving mad and was now coming back to sanity. "I know your record, how you think, how you look at life. Even now you are scheming in that brain of yours. Even now something inside of you is crying 'How can I beat this fellow out? How can I master that tall Chinaman there behind him with a knife in his sash? Shall I play his game until the cards of luck fall right into my lap?' Yes," his eyes sheened again, "that is what you are thinking, my fine patriot! Only I am far, far ahead of you, knowing your thoughts, sensing your reactions. I have dabbled a great deal in the matter of brains, Lee. I have dabbled with entirely too many of them to be misled. Handled them in my hands and looked at them with a close, unwavering eye! I have opened far too many skulls and dug them out with scalpel and spoon. I have slit men open from the tops of their heads to the soles of their feet. I have peeled them bit by bit, layer by layer. I have taken them all apart and put them back together with needle and gut. You see," he smiled, "I know how men are made, what makes them walk, what makes them talk, and what makes them think.

"Why, my fine young fellow, I will show you how and where you are going to actually be of great service to your country, if that will appease your patriotism a mite or more. Oh, you will not go down in prose and poetry for it, to be sure, but you will have done a human thing to help us bring about a war right at this time. It will save any number of men and much bloody fighting. For Japan is a country we must some day reckon with. Yes! And all this time we are waiting we are only allowing her to sharpen her teeth like a boar getting ready to fight. To strike her now, to tear her down before she becomes a menace to all the world—well, can't you see the point, my friend? A fool could! You know, as well as I know, that some day we must fight. Look at the thousands upon thousands of tons of scrap-iron they are buying in this country every day of the month. What for? To make it into high-explosive shells of steel and hurl it back in our teeth! Look at the Sneering Snollivers they send to Washington! Look at the smirking smile on the faces of every one you see in your daily papers! Open contempt! Insult! 'The little brown man's way!'

"And look at the scare he is always throwing!" He laughed bitterly. "At the pictures released by their war department and allowed to come into this country. Pictures that show their airplanes dropping bombs on unarmed villages and killing poor, terrified Chinese by the scores. What are they for? Why, for those who think they will stay at home during the fighting and get rich—like our dollar-per-year men during the late war, my friend. Like the men who manufacture munitions! Like the international bankers who covet war and breed it like I sometimes breed bacteria specimens in a tube! Those pictures are to scare, to say, 'Look out, all of you! Here is how we Japanese do the work! Here is what you citizens behind the lines can expect for yourselves, your wives and children when you fight the little brown men of Nippon!' "

"Very well, doctor," Lee was meticulously patient and going to feel every inch of the way, "and just what could I do about it? What great part could Miss Blunt play in your scheme?"

"She has played one little part, but she has refused to play others." Lafferty looked down at the girl.

"Be thankful that a slip occurred in our plans this morning. Without it there would not be a chance for either of you. But what can you do? You will do as I say, as Mr. Whang Sut Soon tells you, and as Mr. Yang Po-Liang, master of the temple here, tells you. You will not beat about the bush. You will come straight to the point, doing as you are told, remaining prisoners. But not prisoners," he lifted his finger, "as you are now. Not lying in a filthy hole waiting for death with ropes binding your hands behind your backs and eating into your flesh. You will be treated with every consideration, just as Miss Blunt was treated before her head-strongness took the upper hand of her. You will follow instructions. A guard will be over you, but as we go along the way, as you prove your willingness to serve, your consideration will be more and more. When we are all through—and if you have played the game with us—we will give you enough to make you comfortable for the rest of your life and furnish you and Miss Blunt free passage to a place where you can spend the rest of your days as a gentleman and his lady of means. China would welcome you, Lee, but there are other places—many more places yet in this world for one to be safe, regardless of what your so-called Uncle Sam might say about it."

"But—but I don't see the point!" argued Lee, carefully. "All I would wind up with—well, I'd probably get the rope or a firing-squad. I am still an Army man, if you haven't forgotten my history, all of which you pretend to know so well ——"

"So you are afraid, eh?" Lafferty threw back his head and laughed. "So that is it! Odd that I didn't think of it, old fellow. Stupid, I would say. Of course you have a price. All men have a price. Presidents of our country demand it in votes, this block here, that there—and common men like us must resort to the cash!"

"I—I didn't say I would accept anything!"

Anyone looking at Captain Lee would have sworn that he was weakening. Even Holly Blunt must have thought it. There had come into his eyes and face a beaten, down-dog look. He glanced to the right and left. He looked haggard, all worn-out, ready for anything, and was fully aware of the fact that Rodin Lafferty was watching him closely.

"Think, my friend. Just think." Lafferty's voice had dropped to a low, gentle purring. "There beside you is a remarkably beautiful woman. Even she is yours. Yours!" His voice shot up. "Yours regardless of what she may think or say about it. Do as I say. In twenty minutes after you have done it you will be in a cool, sweetly scented room, one good enough for a prince, and there beside you will be this woman—to have her as you like! Anything you ask for will be brought to you. For a time you will remain a prisoner as I have said, but we want you a prisoner no longer than our safety demands it. Take what I have to offer. I am going away. In exactly an hour I will return. Think while I am gone. Think of what most men will do for life, for wealth—and a pretty woman whether she wants the warmth of your arms or not. Call it a cold-blooded proposition. Call it what you like, young man, but even a living frog is better than a dead one. I know, for I have had them both under my scalpel.

"And now, Captain Lee," he bowed like a major-domo, "I shall leave you to your meditations."

With that he was gone. The slab of stone moved back in place. Again the vault was filled with bitter darkness.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE EAVESDROPPERS

"YOU can't do it, Andy. You can't do it!"

"The hell I can't, Holly! Do you expect me to lie down and die like a sick hound when there's a chance of us saving our lives? 'A live frog is better than a dead one!' He's right, damn him, and we've got to admit it. We have a chance for our lives. We can toss it away—and die. What does the government care for us? Off of the back of whose neck is the skin if we are killed? And don't the politicians take their money? Don't they work every scheme under the sun to get it? Look at Congress, look at the whole mess! What a fine bunch of pills! All of them are side-steppers, against this one day, howling for it the next—anything to keep their hands on the votes of the fools who put them in office. Always passing this bill and that, anything that will give them a cut-in. I tell you, *he is right, Holly.*"

"But you can't do it, Andy, you can't do it!"

At times the voices were very feeble as they came through a round, dark hole in the wall where Dr.

Rodin Lafferty was listening. Whang Sut Soon stood beside him. Kai Dai stood beyond them, leaning against the wall. A hack-saw had removed Captain Lee's broken handcuffs from his torn wrists. The wrists were now in bandages, the work of Dr. Lafferty who, for almost ten years, had been giving surgical and medical aid to the members of the Seventh Temple of Yama. It had been through his work, through his closed mouth at all times, that he had won their high confidence. For, as time had passed, they had found him becoming more and more indispensable. He had proven over and over that he was a man who, for a certain fee, could cover this thing and that in police circles. Twice there had been affairs that the police had wanted to determine murder. Members of the *tong* had been arrested and jailed, and it had been Dr. Rodin Lafferty's findings in the autopsies in the morgue at Headquarters that had freed them and sent them scot-free. A man like that could not help becoming indispensable.

To Dr. Rodin Lafferty belonged the credit of arranging all the details of the submarine attacks. Rodin Lafferty had decided and negotiated the price that was to be paid, and the place for the submarine and its crew to hide in a place that a Lafferty before him had owned. As far back as the 17th century, a certain Rodin Lafferty, grandfather several times removed of all the Rodin Laffertys that were to follow, had sailed the Pacific Ocean with the bewhiskered and sullen crew of John Davis the Buccaneer, raider of Panama and a scourge of the seven seas of the earth. Laffertys had fought in the American Revolution, in the War of 1812, in the Black Hawk War, and in the Mexican War. Always on the move, always in the thick of things, they had trailed with the covered wagon trains across the plains and mountains in the California gold rush of '49. Their women had followed in 1850, as rowdy as their males, to fill the dance and gambling halls. The recklessness of red-shirted miners from the gold camps, howling devils with lust and a thirst to spend, had made the Laffertys rich. They had grown powerful in politics and the belles and belled-studs of the social swim of that early American frontier where life was one riotous whirlwind of song and dance.

But the rosiest belle is born to fade. Generations grow old and die. Succeeding ones take their place. Riches change them, for soft-living makes naught but soft men. The Lafferty strain had petered out, leaving only one behind with the degree of a doctor of medicine and a hundredscore acres of country estate burdened with just enough taxes and mortgages to keep a man's back creaking under the strain.

Standing there in the darkness with his ear to a dark hole, he was no spitting image of that Lafferty of old. He lacked the hairy belly and the brawny blacksmith's chest of that Rodin of the sea who had parted the wild waves down across the South Pacific Ocean in a tall ship with a square-rigged man-of-war on his tail. Dr. Rodin Lafferty had slit no throats on a roaring, pirate-drunken Spanish Main. He had never boarded a vessel at sea with the aid of grappling-hooks, and had never fought a rousing good fight with saber and cutlass on a bloody deck. He was a product of modernity. One had to admit it that he was even a better hand with a knife and squeamed no more at the sight of blood than swashbuckling Rodin the Buccaneer, but he was far from being as crude and hell-howlingly noisy about it. He preferred his subjects strapped to a table and properly anaesthetized in a quiet white room with a pretty girl at his elbow to pass him his tools. He was a gentleman, in hat-manners and twaddle, cup and tea. Like many doctors do, he knew how to wheedle old maidens to submit to delicate operations, always of course, for a worth-while fee; and no Arab had a keener eye or a sharper tongue when it came to bartering and receiving enormous sums for a quarter-penny's worth of some harmless—as well as useless—bit of drug. In short, he was a good doctor, as well as an excellent apothecary to boot, for he was so nicely acquainted with all the smirky little tricks of both.

And standing there in the darkness listening to the low quarrelling of Captain Andrew Lee and pretty

Holly Blunt, he was so absolutely certain of himself. In this underground palace of secrets, dark pleasures and screeching mad torture, he was a man of power with which no ordinary mortal could reckon with the slightest hopes of overpowering.

A thin smile moved his lips when he listened to Holly Blunt break into a fit of low sobbing. They were real sobs, not a mere put-on. They came in low spasms, sometimes so faint they were like the weak palpitations of a dying heart's last feeble beats sounding through a stethoscope; and exactly as he would have listened to the heart of a well-paying patient, one he did not care to lose, he listened and studied those sounds. He was, in short, all-doctor there at that hole, one called upon to decide with unerring skill whether the stimulation of a last-minute dose of digitalis would stay the life of his patient or hurry it along its ebbing way.

"You are a coward, Andy," Holly Blunt was saying in a broken voice so low that Lafferty had to hold his ear close to the hole to catch it. "I thought you were a man. I thought you were something a woman could look up to. Something—something a woman could respect, something ——"

"Oh, hell!"

"Instead, Andy," the girl was whispering on desperately, "I find you ready to cower and whimper like a beaten cur at the first pinch of danger. You are a weakling. . . ."

Lafferty frowned as the voice died so low he could not catch it. Captain Lee's voice came to him a few moments later. It was low and guarded.

"Little fool," he was saying, " 'When in Rome do as the Romans do.' We won't have to do as they say any longer than we are absolutely forced to it. We will do what they say now. We can't do anything else."

"Coward!" whispered the girl, fiercely. "Doddering, panic-stricken coward! What a weak, selfish mother must have given birth to you. I hate you! I loathe your very presence! If I had a knife and my poor, dead hands were free I would drive it into your body."

"A damned pretty speech!" Lafferty could tell that Captain Lee was sneering at the girl in the darkness. "Very pretty! No doubt it comes from old Beauregard Blunt himself! I didn't want to be unkind to you. I wanted to treat you with consideration. I thought you were different. . . ."

Lee's voice died away. Dr. Lafferty cursed him under his breath. A minute passed. Only the low, whisper-like sobs of Holly Blunt came from the hole. Lafferty waited patiently, listening as if he again was studying every valve-murmur of a beating heart.

Captain Lee cursed the girl, once in a whisper, once in a slightly louder tone. Holly Blunt checked her sobbing to a faint sniffing that grew lower and lower until it was broken with a sharp whispering.

"Don't slide over against me! I tell you, I loathe you! You are a beast! A cowardly beast!"

"Very well, fool!" Lee's voice was stronger. "I'm through trying to be kind to you. From now on, I'll handle you like a man should handle you. You're nothing but a high-headed, up-nosed snob. You're Navy, through and through! *Pig-headed, stupid, know-it-all Navy!* Very well," his tone lowered, "I'm no longer playing the part of a fool. I'm taking what comes my way. It won't be just a case of 'in Rome as Romans do.' Not by a long shot! I'll take you, just as they promised me I could have you. I've heard that men can *make* a woman like them if they will only go far enough. . . ."

Dr. Lafferty kept listening. When he finally turned away, there was a broad smile on his face. He followed Whang Sut Soon and Kai Dai out into a passageway where they had left their lanterns burning. When they halted there, well away from that dark hole in the wall behind them, Lafferty spoke to Whang Sut Soon in a low voice.

"You see, my good friend Whang," his teeth gave off a slight glint in the lantern light as he smiled, "there is always a way to accomplish a thing. Bait your man not only with life, money and thoughts of luxury, but bait him at the same time with a pretty woman. The white man loves the flesh ——"

"No more than the yellow man, my good doctor!" cut in Whang Sut Soon.

"Perhaps not," smiled on Lafferty, glancing at Kai Dai who leaned against the wall with no apparent interest whatever in their conversation. "But I win my point. You and Yang tried it without the woman interest."

"And," Whang Sut Soon's eyes narrowed, "you propose, do you not, to allow him this woman? This beautiful creature ——"

"My dear Whang," Lafferty tapped him on the shoulder with a long forefinger, "do I, after all, appear fool enough to pass something along to another that I might myself, take?"

"It is a matter, my good doctor," Whang Sut Soon was smiling, and yet his right hand was fingering the hilt of his long knife, "to be decided. Even Master Yang is not above the love of the warmth of a beautiful woman now and then to take the chill from his sacred bones."

"I have done much for you people, Whang!" A sudden hint of anger had shot into Dr. Rodin Lafferty's tone.

"And the pay, my good doctor," smiled Whang Sut Soon, bowing, "has always been exceptionally well, for, as our classics have it, *Kou shou chu jen hsin*—'a lean dog shames his master.' "

"I think I am more to you people than just a damned hireling!" snapped the doctor with the color suddenly draining from his face. "I think I am as good as one of you!"

"My friend, my good doctor friend, have no fears." Whang Sut Soon leaned close to him. There were awakening dragons in his dark eyes. The nostrils of the long nose quivered. The right hand had ceased fingering the jewelled hilt. Instead, it was closed on it now like a mighty fist. "There is but one thing about it. At times, my friend, you are quite too noisy about the mouth. It rankles like a grain of sand in a strong man's eye. You are, to place the cart behind the horse where it belongs, a trifle too often certain of your convictions. We appreciate all you have done and all you are doing. You have been true to us, and the classics say, *Chen chin pu pa huo*—'True gold fears no fire.' Yet, my friend, you must at all times remember that our own laws preside here. And here, my friend, as it has pained me before to tell you, only the ever-pregnant voice of China speaks."

Whang Sut Soon's tone was as gentle as a caressing breeze, but there was unholy danger in that proud, upturned face, that curving, quivering nose, and those ink-wells of eyes where the half-awake dragons were beginning to stir. The balled fist was still snugly about his hilt. Even when he suddenly laughed it relaxed not a trifling bit.

"Very well, Whang Sut Soon!" Dr. Lafferty bowed. He even smiled, but a cold fire seemed kindled in his eyes. "It's thoughtful of you to remind me."

"I admire you, Rodin Lafferty!" Whang Sut Soon's left hand had reached forward, a strong, closing hand on the doctor's shoulder. "Many of us like you here. Even Kai Dai, the emasculated fool, leaning like a stupid ox there against the wall, is fond of you."

"I see no harm in what I said!"

"No," smiled Whang Sut Soon, "but do not set your heart upon this thought of the woman that you have inside your head. It is an issue, my friend, for only Master Yang to decide."

"And if Master Yang should decide," Lafferty could not help the broad sneer that had crawled across his face, "that she is to live, and—and he does not want her for himself ——"

"Then," finished Whang Sut Soon, "the matter shall be referred entirely to me, for, as you know, I am next in power here, my friend."

"And you—and you ——"

"Have already decided the issue in my heart, good friend," bowed Whang Sut Soon. "The woman is warming to my eye. Soul of heaven, my friend, she is fair. By the blood of the Great White Cock!" his eyes blazed, "I swear it!"

CHAPTER XXIV

"GOU MENG!"

WAITING, wondering, watching! Captain Andrew Lee and Holly Blunt were there in the inky darkness, one sitting sullenly, silently against one wall, the other against the other wall. They looked exactly like bitter enemies glaring hatred at each other when the slab of stone opened.

Dr. Rodin Lafferty was the first to enter, lifting his lantern shoulder-high. Whang Sut Soon was right behind him. Beyond Whang Sut Soon were the two old men, wrinkle-faced wretches waiting like dumb brutes. For the moment Kai Dai, the giant, was not in evidence.

Captain Lee scrambled laboriously to his feet, sliding upward against the wall. His lips were curled. Do-or-die determination was in his face. He glanced belligerently at the girl.

Holly Blunt had not moved. She was there against the wall, a slumped figure sitting with her head drooped forward, her eyes staring at the floor. Dejection was written all over her. At the moment she looked idiotic, a crazed woman with her hair tossed forward, her mouth slacked open, the lips loose, ungainly. Tears were still on her cheeks, sparkling in the light of the lanterns held by Dr. Lafferty and Whang Sut Soon.

Lafferty spoke:

"Well, we are back at the appointed time, young fellow! I trust that you two have made up your minds to either do as I say or leave yourselves as you were before I came to see you?"

"I've made up my mind, doctor." Lee's tone was sullen. He fired a glance at Holly Blunt and there were daggers in that glance. "I do not seem quite so successful a persuader as you are, when it comes to Miss Blunt, but I am, at least, boss of my own thoughts and actions. I will appreciate it if you will take these ropes off my wrists. My hands and arms are killing me all the way to the shoulders."

"Sorry, Lee." A thin, hard smile played across Dr. Rodin Lafferty's mouth. "At the present, young fellow, I can't accommodate you. Kai Dai, the extra-large fellow you saw with us an hour ago, has gone to inform Master Yang Po-liang, the all-powered voice of authority here, that we crave an audience. We will know the answer in a few minutes."

He was no more than four feet away, a self-sure man, smiling. Whang Sut Soon was right behind him. Lafferty took a step forward to make more room for Whang Sut Soon. The step placed Lafferty within two feet of Lee.

And, then, Lee struck him. It was the fury of hell personified. Quick as lightning, unfastened cords falling behind him, Lee was like a cyclone suddenly swooping into action. Right fist curving upward, it caught Rodin Lafferty flat on the point of the chin. It jerked the doctor off his feet, lifting him, curving him backward, and sending him driving head-on against that solid-concrete wall.

It was enough to kill a man twice over. The doctor struck. There was a sound as if his head had cracked like a half-rotted egg, and the doctor was going down, a limp bundle in tweeds, his little lantern clattering on the floor.

"Now, Holly!" hissed Lee. *"Look alive!"*

With the same lightning swiftness, Lee was now upon Whang Sut Soon.

Taken off his guard, so quick and unexpected was the attack, Whang Sut Soon threw up his left hand. His right hand shot to the hilt of his knife, but for all the good it did him, he might have thrown up his hand to halt the spilling waters of Niagara Falls.

For a bullet was upon Whang Sut Soon. Bobbing, snarling, eyes two streaks of fighting-cat fury, Lee cut through his guard. The same right fist that had found Dr. Rodin Lafferty's chin now collided like exploding dynamite with the point of Whang Sut Soon's jaw. A left hook followed it, catching the big Chinaman flat on the mouth.

With a snarl and blood flying from his broken lips, Whang Sut Soon reeled backward drunkenly. Captain Lee was right after him, for Whang Sut Soon seemed to have the resistance of a bull. His blade was half out of its hilt when Lee's fist found his throat, sinking into it with all the captain's hurtling weight behind the blow.

Whang Sut Soon went down. He was like a beef struck to insensibility with a maul. His knife rattled on the floor, a gleaming thing like a slender, razor-sharp half-moon in the blinky light of one of the little lanterns rolling on the concrete. Lee drove a furious kick to the middle of Whang Sut Soon's stomach, and snatched up the knife and a lantern.

With her hands free, Holly Blunt had suddenly hurled herself forward. She was upon the dead-still figure of Dr. Rodin Lafferty and was going through his pockets with all the fury of an attacking tigress. Her voice came now, a quick, shrill voice that was like a scream.

"I've got a gun, Andy!"

"Quick, Holly!" Lee's voice was a snarl. Taking no chances, he drove another swift kick that buried the toe of his shoe in Whang Sut Soon's stomach. "I've got this fellow's knife. He has no gun. We've got to get out of here. *Quick, Holly!"*

He darted through the den-like opening to attack the old men, but one of them was already fleeing, racing down the alley and screaming like a panic-stricken crone.

The second old man offered little resistance. He threw up his hands, running backward and screaming at the top of his shattery voice like a wrinkled ape. *"Gou Meng! Hul Soung! Gou Meng!"* he was crying. "Help! Look-out! Murder!"

Lee dashed to him. The man did not seem to have the slightest idea of self-defense. One blow straight to the point of the jaw lifted him off his feet and sent him flying in an unconscious heap against the wall of the passage.

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE BELLY OF YAMA

IT HAD been with little effort that Holly Blunt had sobbed and cried so perfectly there in the darkness. Her aching hands, her shoulders and arms had seen to that. Gnawing away beaver-fashion, Captain Lee had cut the last cord that bound her wrists behind her back. The pain had come then—sharp, shooting pains that kept her on the floor for minutes as the circulation of blood crawled like stinging bees and burning currents of electricity through her veins. The rather quick but equally painful release of Lee had followed. Getting the cords off had been a simple matter when she took a tiny pen-knife from the watch-pocket of his trousers and attacked the bonds with a keen little blade. The "quarrel" had followed. It had been splendid. A pair of Hollywood's motion picture stars could not have played it more effectively. Caustic words had come to them almost without effort. They had said things actually shocking to themselves. But it had all been as it should have been. It had been a case of make-it-real or fail—and they had made it *real.*

"Here, take this!" she was crying now as she followed Lee into the passage. It was a .32 automatic pistol that she had taken from Dr. Rodin Lafferty's right hip pocket. She thrust it into Lee's hand.

"Let's get out of here, Andy!" she was going on, sharply. "Quick! There must be dozens of others in here! They will be on us in a minute!"

But where they were to go was the baffling question now. Lee decided to take the direction opposite to that taken by the old man who had fled screaming like a woman, but, with Holly right behind him, they had gone scarcely seventy feet before they were halted by the passage coming to an abrupt end against smooth concrete.

Secret openings were to the right or left of them, they knew, but there was no time to search for them. They turned, racing like mad in the other direction. It was the same when they reached that end of the passage—mere walls of stone almost as smooth as glass.

For a few moments it looked as if they had escaped from one tomb only to land in a larger one. But a muffled sound of excited voices and the patter of footsteps soon came to them, telling them that the old man who had run away screaming was returning with help.

Lee and Holly whipped out their lanterns by waving them violently. The lantern of the unconscious old man in front of the vault had gone out. The place was pitch-black now, but it was not for long.

A slab in the wall to the left of Lee and Holly began swinging open. A dozen wildly excited Orientals carrying lanterns and armed with clubs and long knives came racing through the opening. Eight of them were rushing on down the passage before the four behind saw Lee and started screeching like madmen.

There was only one thing to do. Lee did it. He caught Holly Blunt by the wrist, snatching her behind him, and he started shooting. He had no feeling of anything for those snarling yellow devils other than to kill as quickly as he could or be killed. Dr. Rodin Lafferty's automatic spat a wicked, ugly-red gash of fire into the opening. The crash of the explosion buckled a stringy-haired Chinaman at the middle and brought him pitching face-forward on the floor to land in a limp heap almost at Captain Lee's feet.

Lee fired again, almost instantly, giving the men not a split-second to recover themselves. Another man was going down, his face twisting with pain. Lee dropped a third with a bullet that smashed the bones of the man's hip as the screeching fellow was trying to turn back. The fourth man did turn, dropping his lantern and wailing like some terror hounded wild animal as he fled into the darkness.

"Let's go, Holly!" cried Lee. *"Quick!"*

There was no time for anything else. The eight men who had entered the passage were whirling back, coming like screeching gorillas charging.

Stamping in the faces of two of the men who had been shot down, Lee and Holly darted through the opening. At the other side of it the man with the shattered hip seized Holly. He was a wild-eyed, screaming maniac with both arms thrown around the lower part of the girl's legs. Captain Lee jammed the muzzle of the automatic right into the man's face—and pulled the trigger. It was like shooting a huge frog. With a dying snarl and a curtain of blood ruffling down his face, the man tumbled backward, one leg kicking out in a last spasmodic movement.

Lee and Holly raced on in darkness now. The same old bitter darkness of the vault. It was like the running of dizzy, drunken people. They thought they were going toward the huge, bull-headed throne. They had passed through an opening exactly like the one behind them when they were sent to the vault, but it came to them after a very few moments that they were in some altogether different room, hall or passage.

Behind them there was a bedlam now. Men were crying to each other. Sharper, more commanding voices rose in the din. Footsteps pattered away in this direction and that.

Lee and Holly ran slower and slower, unable to see their hands before them and afraid every moment of colliding with something or dropping into some pit.

One never knew what to expect in an underground hell-hole like this!

Urged to a faster pace by the pattering sound of feet somewhere directly behind them, they swung to the right. Lee was leading the way, and he almost plunged head-first down a narrow flight of stairs. He caught himself just in time, and guided by a dim glow of light below, hurried on with the girl close behind him.

They were down in a narrow passage lined with walls of rough-cut stones and were racing along it to the left when the sounds of sharp voices came to them from behind and at the head of the stairs. They had gone for possibly sixty feet before the passage turned abruptly to the left. They saw a light now, a candle-like flame burning in a brass bowl set in a niche in the wall to their right. A figure took shape beyond the light. It started to flee, then halted, looking more closely at Lee and the girl now running almost beside him. Lee had his automatic ready to fire if the figure ahead tried to block the way, but he saw that it was a girl. She looked a tiny creature in blue pajamas abundantly decorated with white and gold blossoms.

"It's Cherry Blossom!" hissed Holly. "Don't hurt her, Andy!"

The girl suddenly motioned wildly, and darted on. She came to another sharp turn to the left. She was around it with a bound. When Lee and Holly saw her again she was standing beside a tall slab of stone that had opened in the wall.

"Quickee!" she ordered, waving her hands for frantic haste. *"Quickee!"*

Lee hesitated, but the pattering rush of feet and the snarl of voices coming from beyond the turn behind them, drove him on. They leaped through the opening into a huge, dimly lighted room. At a glance Lee and Holly saw that it was the throne room of Yama, the horn-headed idol.

"Comee!" With the slab closed in the wall behind her, Cherry Blossom had leaped forward to lead the way. "Me showee!"

The throne room was empty save for a sleepy old man nodding in front of the altar-bowls.

"No hear, no see," whispered Cherry Blossom over her shoulder as she led the way on behind thick, richly brocaded drapes suspended from the tall ceiling to the floor and covering a large portion of the wall. "Comee!"

By the girl's words, Lee understood that the old man in front of the altar was both blind and deaf. He stirred not a muscle, and soon Lee and Holly were gone behind the drapes.

Cherry Blossom kept leading the way on. In a few moments they were behind the huge idol. The girl suddenly halted. She touched something in the stone base of the idol. Another confounded opening took shape.

"Caree, caree!" whispered the girl. "Fol' quietee."

Another flight of stairs leading downward was in front of Lee and Holly. This time they were covered with rich, deep rugs. Above them stretched the empty belly of the inside of the idol. An iron ladder ran up one side of it, going to a platform high up there inside the head of the thing.

"Upee! upee!" whispered Cherry Blossom as she closed the stone panel behind her by touching something. "Safee place fo' now."

But going up that ladder looked like a trap to Captain Lee. He had no assurance that he could trust Cherry Blossom. She had led him this far. He had followed because there was nothing else to do. But now, to go up that ladder—well, he would not do it!

With three cartridges left in Dr. Lafferty's automatic and Whang Sut Soon's long knife in his belt, he led the way on down the stairs. Cherry Blossom hissed angrily, but Lee kept going. He struck a dim pool of light at the foot of the steps, and turned into a hall-like passage to his left.

Cherry Blossom shrank as if her terror of something was growing in leaps. Holly Blunt followed right along, keeping close to Lee. In a half-minute they realized that they should have continued to follow Cherry Blossom's instructions. For Kai Dai suddenly appeared. He came darting out of an opening in a wall. The brute's one staring eye appeared to glitter like some tiny lantern. He screeched a warning to some one behind him, and came toward Lee with the quickness of a lion.

There was no time to argue points with a madman. Captain Lee shot him. He all but saw his bullet center the giant's chest. He saw the blood spout through Kai Dai's rags. He fired again. Again he saw blood come from Kai Dai's brute chest. This time it squirted. Lee fired his third shot then. A streak of red leaped like a blade from the side of Kai Dai's face, but it did not halt him.

It was the rush of a dying man. Captain Lee tried to whip up Whang Sut Soon's keen blade. He did get it up high enough to drive it into one side of Kai Dai's stomach, but Kai Dai was upon him. Head down, the giant struck with the force of a bullet. Lee was simply torn off his feet and hurled backward and down. The back of his head struck the concrete floor with a sickening *klunk*. He made one spasmodic effort to get up, but he fell back with his eyes closing and the dying Kai Dai sprawled atop of him.

Other men had appeared even as Lee and the giant were falling. Crying like *caw*-ing crows, they came out of the opening where Kai Dai had appeared. They seized Holly Blunt, hurling her to the floor. They seized Cherry Blossom. For a moment the screams of Cherry Blossom and the noisy voices of the men seemed to swallow everything.

Things grew hazy then to Holly Blunt. They seemed to clear in just a minute, and when she looked up Whang Sut Soon stood above her with his big knife in his right hand. The thumb of his left was idly feeling along the keen edge of the blade.

"Poor little foolish flower!" Whang Sut Soon was smiling. "A flower in full-bloom trying to flee on a lazy wind! How far did you fly, little white swan, before we clipped your pretty wings?"

He threw back his shoulders, and laughed. It was a wicked, up-rushing laugh, one that filled the place like a shriek. Then he turned, his long robes swishing. He looked down at the limp figure of Captain Lee. Then he looked at the bound little bundle of Cherry Blossom lying watching him with wide, terror-filled eyes. Whang Sut Soon's lips curled. His eyes blazed. He spoke in his native tongue. He did not call her Cherry Blossom now. He called her Fa Hark—Dark Flower.

"And you, *gee na!*" His voice was as sharp as an eagle's scream. *"Sow! Whelp!* Do your bones ache, also, for the death that will now surely come to these?"

"Jen fei sheng hsien shu neng wu kuo?" murmured the wild-eyed girl with trembling lips.

"Hai!" Whang Sut Soon laughed. " 'Who but the sages are free from faults,' eh? By the blood of the Great White Cock, you are a fool. I swear it, little one, whose arms were once so soft and lips so tender! Hai!"

"Jen fei sheng hsien shu neng wu kuo," repeated the girl in a voice so low she was like some little night bird *peep*-ing sleepily there on the hard floor. *"Fu Tsu hua ——"*

"I care not what Confucius said!" He laughed harshly and took a step closer to her, towering there above her. "After all, he was but a man born from the belly of a woman! Better think now, my little one, of yourself. Once before you lifted your hand against mine. And now you would attempt to save her!" He half turned and pointed his knife at Holly Blunt. "Hai! I should have known, for no man can tell the way the empty winds of a woman's head may blow."

"I know the law," mumbled the girl, "but I hate it here where the terrors never sleep and the souls of dead men fill the passages like shadows whispering in their beards. I am afraid. Since the day I came I have been afraid."

"Here, fool," he hissed, "there is neither day nor night ——"

"Nor sunshine nor moonlight," cut in the girl in a stronger voice, "nor the smell of a flower unless it be a wilted one clipped by a shear in its prime of life and brought here only to die. All things come here only to die."

"And very soon," he laughed softly, "you, too, will die, my juiceless lemon."

"And then I will sleep, Whang Sut Soon," she attempted to smile. "Long and peacefully will I sleep, Whang Sut Soon!"

"You forget the writings that deal with the unfaithful woman, little one." He spoke quietly, standing there with his head cocked to one side, watching her with shining eyes. "For ten thousand years old men devils wearing yard-long faces and trailing beards of vermin will chase you across the skies with crooked sticks. You will find the very touch of those sticks a thousand times more painful than the sting of the deadliest scorpion's prong. At night your moans and wails and shrieks will be in the roof of the house where your mother spilled you from her belly. Your spirit will haunt your father's fields. Your ghost will pollute his well so that he or she who drinks of the water will fall ill with a fever and die. Any woman with a child in her who sleeps in the room where you were born will have the milk canker in her breasts. It is so written. The voice of the gods declare all things. There is no escaping the laws."

"I do not believe all I hear or read or see or ——"

"No, you are as empty of reason as a nut robbed of its kernel. So were you born. So will you soon die."

"And you will not care, Whang Sut Soon?" All the shining innocence of a child was in her doll-like face as she lay there looking up at him with her soft pools of brown-ink eyes.

"Not as much as that!" He tossed his knife from his right hand to his left and snapped his fingers. "No more than an eagle cares for the bleat of a goat!"

"And yet, Whang Sut Soon," the girl's lips moved with a weary smile, "a son I gave you ——"

"Hai, yes!" he sneered. "A weakling who died before he sucked!"

"He came before his time," moisture was agleam in her eyes, "because you beat me, Whang Sut Soon ——"

"Enough, woman!" Whang Sut Soon stamped the floor a flat *whack!* He looked at the waiting men beyond him, and snapped his fingers. "Take her to the Couch of Slow Oblivion. In a few moments I will be done with these," he jerked his head toward Holly Blunt and Captain Lee. "I will then do my duty by Dark Flower as a man. By the blood of the Great White Cock," he stamped again, "I swear it!"

CHAPTER XXVI

BEAUTY SLEEPS—WITH DEATH

WITH darkness having settled long before the discovery of the really first big lead, Old Eternity Bill Mandell and Admiral Beauregard Blunt were at the work with the assurance that they were, at last, *going somewhere.*

Water pressure—probably because its action was noiseless—lifted and lowered the secret platform found in the old building filled with barrels and baled hides. A two-inch pipe-line had been tapped into one of the city mains. A slight pull on an innocent-looking rusty spike in the wall operated an automatic valve in the bottom of the deep shaft. In turn, the valve released the locked-in pressure of water in a long cylinder, and thus lowered the platform with a silence that was nothing short of ghostly.

The shaft was deeper than it had appeared to the excited ensign. It was every inch of seventy feet from the rotting floor of the old building to the iron-bound door in the bottom of the pit.

And that door was the most misleading thing of the entire shaft. It was symbolic of the patience and the forethought of whoever the men were who had constructed the infernal thing. It stood the ravages of crow-bars, pick-axes and pinch-bars for nearly an hour before it came clattering down in the pit. Four husky blue-jackets wiped balls of perspiration from their faces—and cursed. For in front of them stood another door exactly like the first.

That second door was equally as unyielding as the first, but it fell sooner, because the men now at work with the axes and bars were angered to the keenest fighting pitch and wielded their tools with a vim and an oath at the same time that expressed their feelings, physical and mental. When that second iron-shod door-thing came down, it exposed a third door just like the first, beyond it. There was bitter denunciation and explosive vocabulary from the sailors that delved deep and thrust rapier blows at the doubtful parentage of the man or men who had constructed such a thing.

Angered enough to eat their own shoes and cursing their own mothers for a change, the blue-jackets cut through the third door. Their dismay knew no bounds when only a rough wall of concrete stood in front of them to reward them for their blistered hands, their aching backs and barked knuckles.

Because of the narrowness of space, Blunt and Mandell had remained above, waiting impatiently. Streaming with perspiration, a red-headed, rawboned and freckle-faced sailor from the *Arizona* was sent up to report. He climbed out of the shaft, and saluted Blunt respectfully but, at the same time, with a fierceness that was a trifle more war-like than downright complimentary.

"Well?" Blunt was blunt. "What?"

"Well, well, sir," the sailor swallowed as if to down a lump in his throat and licked his lips with a whip-like lash of his tongue, and spoke with a down-on-the-farm drawl, "that there ensign down there sent me up to tell you that we've cut and pulled down three doors. We are all skint up an' nigh tuckered out ——"

"Well! Well! Well!" fired Blunt, his voice snapping with machine-gun rapidity. "Get it out, man, get it out! You don't have to stop to milk a cow, do you? What have you found?"

"Concrete!" said the sailor. "Ain't nothin' but concrete. Just a damned wall, beggin' your pardon, sir," he saluted again. "Somebody poured it to make a pack of suckers out of us."

"Concrete?" Blunt's eyes widened.

"Concrete!" said the sailor, flatly. "Nothin' but concrete, sir."

"My God!" groaned Blunt. "Let's get down there, Goliath, if there's only room enough left for us to stand on our heads."

But the wreckage of the doors was brought up before they could go down. Then, with the ensign manipulating the rusty spike in the wall, the platform was lowered slowly and stopped every few feet so that Mandell and Blunt could examine the walls of the shaft with the aid of powerful flashlights.

Rough, thick planks lined two of the walls almost to the bottom of the shaft. Mandell and Blunt went to the bottom of the pit and were slowly being brought up again when the incessant tapping and sounding of the pinch-bars they were using jarred some secret spring and latch loose. Without a sound, four broad planks started sliding downward. Water pressure was again playing its part in the mysterious shaft. Blunt and Mandell could hear it gurgling and softly spilling somewhere in that wall in front of them.

The hole that had opened was no more than twenty feet from the top of the shaft. It was fully six feet high and four feet wide. A tunnel equally as high and wide led away from it. Lined with brick and stone it was cut off at the end of forty or fifty feet by another one of those infernal iron-bound doors of thick oak.

Blue-jackets following Blunt and Mandell into the place looked at each other, and groaned aloud. But they set to work with the same old vim, hacking, clawing with their axes and bars. Holes gradually took shape in the door. Soon afterwards it swung open noiselessly on its stout, well-greased hinges and a mumble of relief came from the blue-jackets. Two larger, longer tunnels were ahead of them now, branching together there at the opened door.

Mandell was exactly like a hound now, a hound baying on a hot trail. More blue-jackets were sent for. They came in a swarm. They filled the two tunnels. And going on ahead of them, marking this wall and that with chalk, Mandell laid out the work for the men.

"Cut in here! Cut in there!" Mandell kept ordering. "See the floor? Look at it closely. You can actually see trails on it where feet have scarred the concrete until it's a tell-tale path."

And at every place he pointed out to them, the men managed to pry open thick slabs. But it was a hell's tangle of passage after passage. Some were mere blinds that led them only a short distance before they came to an end. One took them up into a cat-shop by a narrow stairway where an old, old Chinaman with weak, watering eyes sat stone-deaf among a dozen cages of mangy-looking felines. And the old man knew nothing, was "velly solly," "no sabby," "no know him wallee open likee dooree." Oh, yes, he was very "solly" and could not catch the point or the meaning of why a flight of stairs should come up out of the ground and a panel should open there in the wall of his shop. He kept right on being sorry, even when an impatient first-class signalman by the name of Oliver Hall, from the *Colorado,* knocked him sprawling among his upsetting cages and squalling cats and kicked him head-long down the mysterious stairs.

Work, work, work. It looked so ungodly hopeless, but Blunt and Mandell were man-drivers and man-killers with the work. Mandell had completely forgotten his ever-hungry belly. No thought of sleep or fatigue troubled him. He was a hard-driving old hellion.

It was ten minutes to midnight when a sailor came dashing down a passage with a white face and excitement shining in his eyes like balls of light. From force of habit, he saluted Mandell.

"We've found the damndest place you ever looked at!" reported the sailor, "and—and," he added breathlessly, "I guess, the prettiest dead Chink girl you ever looked at!"

The sailor led him along a passage, through a gouged-out slab in a wall, and down a stairway to another hole in a wall. Through that hall was a room a dozen feet square. Its walls, floor and ceiling had been painted a dead-black; and standing against each wall, four in a row, were grinning skeletons with bones so white that a glance told Mandell they had been white-washed.

But it was not the leering skeletons in that room of death that caught Mandell's gaze and held him rooted to the spot with staring eyes. The thing that held him was a long, high couch covered with black rubber and a naked figure atop of it. The figure was that of a girl—a pretty little child-woman lying flat on her back. Her eyes were closed. On the long lashes of both eyes hung the crystal drops of tears. Her arms were strapped to her sides and in the larger vein of each forearm there was a tiny, pin-like prick; and from each prick little drops of blood were oozing and dropping one by one into a black box of black sand at either side of the couch.

There was something in the girl's left hand. Mandell opened it gently, and took out a little wad of cheap paper. He unfolded it. His lips puckered into a frown as he scanned the paper. On it were three pitiful drawings such as a child of eight or nine would make with grease crayons; and all Mandell could make of it was a crude picture of a rising sun, an uncertain thing that looked like a moon surrounded by feeble stars, and one lone little flower growing out of markings that represented the side of a bald hill.

He did not know it then, but he was standing beside Dark Flower, sleeping exhaustedly and slow-dying there on that couch; and the paper he held in his hand represented only the hungry yearnings of a child long denied the tranquillity of contact with the great outer world of sunshine, moonlight and flowers.

CHAPTER XXVII

FEAR

MEN talking. . . . Men whispering. . . . Excitement. . . . Footsteps pattering. . . . A voice shrilling here and there. . . . And then silence like men holding their breaths in a vast darkness. . . . Silence! . . . Just silence—and darkness! . . . A bitter, clinging cloak of blackness. . . . So thick you could feel it. . . . An awful, terrible darkness—and awful excitement about something. . . . What?

Holly Blunt opened her eyes. Wide, staring eyes. She wondered if she was going mad—if she had not already gone mad. She wondered if she was dead and condemned to the everlasting terror preachers talked about. What a thin idea they had of Hell! Poor bandy-legged, spindle-necked lot. Holy Joes! That is what Beauregard Blunt called them on the Yangtze. . . . Holy Joes! . . . Always with their tongues in their cheeks. . . . Always talking Hell. . . . Funny. . . . Very funny!—Holly Blunt laughed, wildly, crazily.

And then she was awake again. It was a slow, dull, stupid awakening. She hoped it was some madcap nightmare and that in a moment she would find herself in the brass-postered bed in the northeast bedroom of the old brownstone on Russian Hill and hear the jerky rattle of the cable-cars coming up California.

She stared at the oily darkness and thought of Cherry Blossom, whose true name was Fa Hark—Dark Flower.

Holly Blunt had begged like a sinner at the gate of Heaven for Fa Hark. But Fa Hark was doomed to die. That was certain; and Whang Sut Soon had laughed. Oh, just *laughed!* It was the way of him. "By the blood of the Great White Cock!" Never in her life had Holly Blunt believed there could be a human being so cruel. He was a demon, a terror, a yellow devil straight from Hell if one ever walked on two feet!

And he had laughed so long and loudly at her. Laughed! Big, loud, long—a laugh that had sent chills crawling through her veins, a merciless laugh born of the devil and due to reap its true reward only in Hell!

"Soul of Heaven," he had taunted her, standing there fingering his blade after men had carried the softly sobbing Dark Flower away, "you forget the voice of our gods. Our gods commanded us to revenge poor, stumbling old China who asks naught of the world than to be let alone to pursue her affairs as her ancestors of thousands of years ago pursued them. Dark Flower knew the law. Aye, a thousand times o'er she knew it. It is written, soul of my eye, and no man—not even my most illustrious father—can change it. Dark Flower dies, and so must you, pale, pale flower. Even now you are beyond my power. I am—as I have said before—master here only in second command. Were I now—this moment—in Yang Po-liang's most honorable skin, I could not change the law. Die you will. My voice is silent. I am but a mouthpiece of my gods. My soul is not my own soul, else my spirit might weaken, for, woman, you are warming to my body and soul. I swear it! By the blood of the Great White Cock, it is so!"

And he had *laughed* again. And then they had taken her and Captain Andrew Lee away. Just like they were calves or pigs trussed for the market! And just as unceremoniously, they had dumped them down in another dark vault, one where the air was staler, where there was no hole in the wall. Chains now fastened their hands behind their backs, and guards with knives and pistols in their belts paced the passage beyond the slab of concrete that marked the closed door of the stinking den.

"Andy, are you all right?"

Holly Blunt moved her feet as she spoke, touching him. There was no response. For all that might have mattered, Captain Lee was dead. He was so still, so inert. He might have been a rubber man lying there. She could not hear him breathe. She rolled over close to him, and lay there with her head against his side. His heart was beating, weakly but steadily enough. That meant that he was alive. How much alive she did not care to random a guess.

She heard only those moving feet now, those excited voices, that incessant calling back and forth. There was no way of telling how long she had been there in the darkness with Lee. It was as though she had died and come half-back to life a dozen times before all things actually cleared for her.

But something was up. Something was surely up! There was too much excitement beyond the slab of stone of the door. Too much of this! Too much of that! Finally the slab of stone swung outward. Carrying the usual little brass lantern, Whang Sut Soon came into the vault.

"Well, pale one," he bowed, the flashy hilt of his blade showing through his robes, "it looks as if the government is falling on our heads in spite of our most painstaking arrangements to keep them out."

"You mean—you mean ——" Holly Blunt struggled and managed to sit up. "—— that—that ——"

"Startling, eh?" A broad smile moved Whang Sut Soon's lips. "Surely it fills you with hope, for—whether you realize it or not—the hour is late. Aye, little one, it is close to midnight by the way you reckon time."

There was no time for anything else. A wild-eyed Chinaman—a little old fellow with buck-teeth, a puckered mouth and a mere wart for a nose—came darting into the vault. He shot out a wild flow of Chinese that seemed to startle Whang Sut Soon.

Dr. Rodin Lafferty appeared a few moments behind the man. He wore a bandage around his throat. One side of his head seemed swollen. He spoke with great difficulty.

"Hurry!" he ordered. "They—are—breaking through—at—last. Damn—them!"

"Eh?" Whang Sut Soon, whirled, looking at him. "So soon, my good doctor friend?"

"Even—now!" nodded Lafferty. "They—are—stopping at—nothing!"

"So!" Whang Sut Soon stiffened. "Hai!"

Another man came hurrying in. He spoke rapidly, waving his hands. Holly Blunt could not tell what he was saying, but he had scarcely finished before Yang Po-liang appeared.

That the old man was laboring under the stress of great excitement was apparent. His eyes burned. They were like live little coals in a skeleton's head. Lips trembling, words coming in an uncertain gibbering, he was like a scolding hen. Behind him feet were still pattering. Noisy voices were lifting and falling with tremendous excitement. Now and then Holly Blunt could hear them calling to one another in voices that were laden with nothing short of terror. And

Yang Po-liang was rushing on and on. Holly Blunt could not tell what he was saying, but, whatever it was, it was throwing Dr. Rodin Lafferty into a fit of near hysteria. Evidently he understood the particular dialect of Chinese that Yang Po-liang was speaking, for he suddenly cut in on the old man, interrupting him in English.

"But even if they have got to Fa Hark," he was saying, "and found her yet alive, is the fool apt to talk?"

"Who knows what a woman may do?" Whang Sut Soon answered him in English and with a sneer. "Surely she hates it here. She hates me. She hates everything here!"

"But—but the law!" Lafferty's intense excitement had steadied his voice remarkably well. "There will be her father and mother in China to think about. They know the length of the arms of Yama ——"

"Yes," nodded Whang Sut Soon with a wry smile, "and know that her father, her mother and her brothers—and even her uncles and aunts—will suffer for her misdeeds, according to the law, but, my good friend," his dry smile widened, "Dark Flower has none of those. Some one has told the fool that smallpox has swept her village clean. She smiled at me and told me so when I tapped the veins of her arms."

"Then this *is hell!*" Lafferty's voice was cold with growing alarm. "We've got to get them," he nodded toward Lee and Holly, "out of here ——"

"And to the big house on the headland," agreed Yang Po-liang. "There must be no waste of time ——"

"But—but," Lafferty's face had grown white with fear, "there is the danger of Dark Flower telling ——"

"About the house and lagoon?" Whang Sut Soon laughed a funny little sound. "By the blood of the Great White Cock, no! Not more than six men here know of the place. Dark Flower has never even heard of it. She ——"

"Fools!" hissed Yang Po-liang. *"Fools!* Is this a place to stand and talk like nagging old women when the very roofs are coming down on our heads? Blood of a goat's vermin, are you mad! Off with the swine! Down the eleventh passage and to the fishing boat. At once! There is no time for delay. Gag them. Gag them well! Let there be no sound. But go quickly. *Very quickly, fools!* If the sailors and the government detectives break through to the temple, then only the gods can save us!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

"HELP!"

"SHE's not dead, but we've got to work fast or she soon will be." Old Eternity Bill Mandell spoke from the side of his mouth to Admiral Blunt and Buck Stone when they came into the skeleton-leering room and halted with staring eyes at the foot of the couch on which Dark Flower was lying. "She's in a coma. Must have been bleeding for hours. A transfusion will be about all that can save her—and she must have it at once."

He had already put tourniquets on the girl's arms, halting the flow of blood. With the straps cut that bound her to the table, he rolled her in his ponderous overcoat, and a few minutes later three sailors were hurrying away with her to a hospital.

"And leave a guard over her!" was Mandell's final instruction. "Let no one see her but the surgeons in charge and a couple of nurses who will be detailed to attend her."

"You had better call Dr. Lafferty in on this, Goliath," suggested Admiral Blunt. "He's one of the best ——"

"The police are out of it, admiral." For some reason a half-weird light shone in Mandell's eyes. "I am glad they are."

"What do you mean, Goliath?" Suspicion lighted Admiral Blunt's eyes.

"Oh, nothing!" Mandell shook back his big shoulders. "Just an old bat's idea of being funny, probably."

"That's not the case at all!" Blunt laid a heavy hand on Mandell's shoulder. "Once before you've humped your back when I mentioned Lafferty and was about to call him in in consultation with Dr. Steele ——"

"Admiral," Mandell cut him off with a hard glint in his old eyes, "in this little game instinct, suspicion and two and two making four go a long way. Rodin Lafferty may be the soul of honor. He may be everything it pertains to, but, admiral, he's a shade too closely connected with this hell-fired Chinatown. Yes, that's it, if you must have it all."

"But—but ——"

"Well, *dammit!*" Mandell's lips curled, "His reports on the skeletons of Admiral Takemura and T. Ishikawa were just a shade too perfect to suit the pleasure of my blood."

"Is that all you can say against the man, Goliath, to ——"

"That's bountiful for right now, admiral," Mandell chuckled his old chuckle, "bountiful. I would rather not discuss it. We have too many things on our hands right now."

Blows of axes and the rattle of 'bars came to them in a steady din as they left the room and returned to the myriad of passageways. The place by this time was crammed full of sailors. Hall of the *Colorado* found Mandell and Blunt in the crowd.

"We've found something else, sir!" Hall saluted stiffly. "Cut through a wall just a few minutes ago and came upon it!"

"What does it look like, Hall?" demanded Blunt.

"Like an oven, sir," explained the sailor. "Like, I'd say, a coke-oven—one, you know, sir, where they burn coal into coke. The kind found around coal mines in the South ——"

"Yes! Yes!" Blunt was impatient. "Lead us to it, Hall."

They went through one hole in the walls after another, going from one gloomy passage to another until they descended a narrow, iron-railed flight of stairs. They were at the bottom of the stairs when old Eternity Bill Mandell's big flashlight outlined a small, round object lying among a little pile of bricks against a wall on their left. Mandell picked it up. Blunt halted. Hall was going on.

"What is it, Goliath?"

Mandell made no answer for the moment. He was examining his find closely. It was a small bracelet, made of hand-hammered Chinese gold.

"What—what have you found?" Blunt's voice was suddenly excited as he stood there with his flashlight now held close to the bracelet. "My God, man!" He snatched the bracelet from Mandell's hands. His eyes were wide. His breath came quickly. "It—it—belongs ——"

"To Holly, yes," finished Mandell, quietly. "Something, if I remember correctly, that you picked up for her in China."

"In—in Fuchow—three years ago!" Blunt's face had turned as gray as ashes. "Why—why, Goliath, it means ——"

A ringing cry of terror, coming from ahead of them, cut him off. Another followed it, then it broke into a bedlam of noise. Hall was crying something. A hoarse, wailing voice cut him off. There were other cries then, and now came the quick, drowning thunder of rapid pistol shots. Hall's voice rang out again, sharp, far-reaching and as clear as a bugle's blast.

"Help! Admiral! Mandell! Everybody! *Come quick!*"

A shattery scream followed. Mandell and Blunt darted on, conscious of a mob of blue-jackets swarming the head of the stairs behind them. Racing along a broad passage, Blunt and Mandell came to an open door of iron in a circular wall. A flashlight was burning in the place, lying on a damp floor among shells and bones and giving off a weak glow. Mandell's and Blunt's lights flooded the place with illumination. They saw Hall and three more sailors then.

And they saw other things! They saw waving, curling and twisting ropes of brown, as large as the largest hawsers. It was like a leafless tree in action with all its limbs curling and twisting about the struggling bodies of the four sailors, dragging them to it. The thing was perched on the rim of a well-like curbing. Sounds came from it—a deep, pig-like grunting and a fiendishly delighted squealing; and even as Blunt and Mandell looked at the monster—that terrible thing there with four men in its wet-leather grasp—other little monsters were appearing, coming like spiders—hungry, eager things darting to the kill. . . .

CHAPTER XXIX

IN THE HOUSE BY THE SEA

RISING and falling, rising and falling, swinging through space. . . . There was a smell of rope, tar and fish when Captain Andrew Lee opened his eyes. The air was heavy and wet with fog. His face was swollen. Piles of rope and nets and gear lay atop of him. Somewhere a motor was throbbing. There was a sound of water lapping and slapping. . . . And that rising and falling, that nauseous swinging to and fro like the pendulum of some giant clock. And something hurting his mouth. . . . A wad choking him, suffocating him. . . . And men whispering. . . . Talking in low, guarded voices. . . . And once the brilliant beam of a powerful searchlight sweeping over everything and steadying as if men behind the light were minutely examining all that lay in its path.

Lee did not know it, but a U. S. Coast Guard cutter's crew were studying the early-morning fleet of fishing boats putting out to sea, examining every boat in the long "water-bug" line of small craft.

Lee lay there listening. He knew where he was.

One could not mistake the smells of a fishing boat. And that rising and falling, that lapping and slapping of water told him he was in the Golden Gate. That channel was never still, always rough, even when the Pacific Ocean was as still as a mill-pond. Soon the boat was lifting and falling on long, lazy rollers of the sea, and Lee knew that they had cleared the Golden Gate.

Through the tangle of ropes and nets above his face, he caught a glimpse of stars. That meant they were out beyond the fog hanging over San Francisco Bay. By watching the stars, he could tell a short time later that the boat was swinging northward.

He could hear a man nervously laughing now. Other voices were stronger. One of them spoke with a decided Italian accent. A man answered him, and Lee recognized Dr. Rodin Lafferty's voice.

"Very simple, Tony," the doctor was saying. "It's not your first trip to the lagoon."

"Sure! Thass alla right," the Italian voice answered. "But thatta lagoon maybe make somebod' suspish! She no gooda to catcha da feesh. Nobod' goes thata place. . . ."

The voice trailed off, telling Lee the men were walking away from him. Other voices came now. Lee recognized Whang Sut Soon's somewhere above him. Whang Sut Soon was speaking to some one in Chinese.

It was as though Lee slept exhaustedly for a long time then. When he opened his eyes he saw that dawn had started breaking. A flock of sea-gulls wheeled and careened overhead, filling the air with their sharp, ever-hungry cries. It had grown foggy again, and there was a noise of waves crashing and cannonading on a rough shore. The boat's motor had been slowed down to a dull throbbing and *chug*-ing. Suddenly it was speeded up. The boat rocked and plunged crazily for a few minutes. It steadied gradually. It floated along now as smoothly as a chip on a glass-still pond.

Rope fenders were being hung over the starboard side of the boat a short time later. The motor's clutch was thrown out of mesh. The motor raced, then died away to a low sobbing. There was a grating sound. The boat was landing. It was but a few minutes later that the ropes and gear were thrown off of Lee. Two burly Chinamen lifted him. As he was brought up on the small after-deck he caught a glimpse of the boat's name-board on the rear wall of the pilot house. It read *Saluta*.

"All right, fellows, buzz him along!"

Dr. Lafferty had appeared. He seemed in exceptionally fine fettle. His face was wreathed in smiles. He laughed. He laughed so easily, so wholeheartedly—and there was not a thing that Lee could see to cause a man to laugh. And he talked incessantly—and about nothing in particular. He was like an old gramophone wound up and running completely away with itself. Lee caught a glimpse of his eyes. They were intensely bright, the pupils dilated. His nostrils twitched. He looked like a man absolutely bubbling over with himself.

Morphine!

Lee was certain of it as he was being carried up a rocky trail covered over with low manzanita and buck-brush until it was like a tunnel. Lafferty was bobbing along ahead of him. He slipped and fell. It was a fall that would have ordinarily made a man groan with the shock and pain of it. But Lafferty laughed. He cackled. He was exactly like a pullet that had just laid her first egg.

"Buzz along with him, my hearties!" he kept crying. "Buzz along with him!"

And then Whang Sut Soon's voice came to Lee from somewhere behind. It smacked of a temper grown short enough to fight.

"The noise of your mouth grows painful, my good doctor friend!" declared the voice. "Wait until we are at least in the house before you sing so loudly, for there is a saying that both trees and rocks sometimes have ears."

And Dr. Lafferty only laughed at the rebuke. He was a wound-up bundle of noise, and not a thing was going to stop him!

It was the same when they reached a doorway of the old house there above the big lagoon northeast of the towering headland. The men carrying Lee stumbled. One of them fell so hard it looked as if he had slipped his knee cap—and it tickled Lafferty, tickled him until his eyes were actually quivering in their sockets.

"To your right, to your right!" ordered Whang Sut Soon, still keeping behind Lee and directing the men who were carrying him. "Through that door and down the stairs."

Lee was being carried into a basement room a few moments later. He was flung into a deep old leather chair. A glance to the right and left showed him shelves of books, old tomes and manuscripts. A fire burned in the fireplace. Beyond a long table sat Holly Blunt. A powerful man in the gold-striped blue uniform of a captain of the old Imperial German Navy, was bending over the girl and carefully clipping away a gag from her mouth with a long pair of shears.

Some one removed the gag from Lee's mouth. For a minute Lee sat there, frowning with pain as he closed and opened his mouth repeatedly to take away the numbness that had settled in his jaws.

The man in the uniform had finished with Holly Blunt. He stepped back, smiling. Captain Lee was jolted with surprise then; for as the man in the captain's uniform moved to one side, Lee saw a most familiar figure sitting still and straight in a chair beyond Holly.

One glance was enough for Lee to recognize the man. He was Mr. Y. Takahasha, the Japanese Consulate.

"Distinguished company, eh, my friend?" softly chuckled the voice of Whang Sut Soon behind Captain Lee. "I see that you recognize the gentleman!"

CHAPTER XXX

A BATTLE ENDS

TWO sailors from the *Arizona* had pried the heavy dome loose from the well with crow-bars. They had made considerable noise. With the chain pried loose from the thick ring in the top of it, the dome had finally tumbled off the well. The rest had been a matter of instant action from the well. A horrible mass of shapeless flesh, all waving and squirming arms, had appeared—a loathsome, gripping monster, alive with cold, anticipating intelligence, and moving as swiftly as a swallow.

It was without doubt a female octopus. It was larger than the average male, and, too, there were the six smaller ones, showing that the monster not only tolerated them but mothered them as well. The thing had struck with a fighting fury beyond description. Up from the six feet of sea-water in the bottom of the well like a bullet, the monster had seized one of the sailors. The second sailor had run to the man's aid, and had had one of those squirmy, struggling, straining tentacles flung around his body. The third sailor had darted in then. His fate had been the same as the others. It was the same when Hall saw the battle and darted close to it. He had emptied a Navy pistol into the thing's knotting and reknotting mass of pulpy body.

But an octopus has no feeling. It has but one vital spot, and that is the devil-brain or heart in the back of what should be the monster's neck. It is a voracious, sack-like ball of body, a body as elastic as rubber, one that can stretch and expand into a snake. It is the world's most awful bundle of awfulness, a writhing, squirming mass of hell-fury, attaching itself to its victim with four hundred vacuum cups on its eight snaky legs. It is the ocean's most crafty thug, a killer and eater of sharks, and—at times—a fighting, darting villain that can put a sperm whale, their only natural enemy, to rout. A sharp knife will cut through it like butter, and yet it is an almost impossible thing to kill, for its strength is beyond measure. It is as soft as jelly, and yet as tough as a wire cable. In short, it is the monster-supreme of earth or sea or Hell.

Squirting ink and grumbling, a master-devil grunting, smacking and squealing with the sheer joy of an opportunity to fight, the thing was rapidly drawing one of its victims to its mouth. And such a mouth! It was but a gaping pocket, soft and fleshy, yet just within lurked its big, horny beak, opened exactly like a parrot's bill to receive its first taste of the sailor's blood.

And the sailor had fainted. It was seventy times more than enough to make any man faint. The very terror of it was enough to burst a strong man's heart with fear.

With one of those powerful tentacles wrapped around his waist with the grip of a full-grown boa constrictor, Hall had ceased to struggle. He was trying desperately but vainly to get another clip of cartridges out of one of the little pockets on his broad canvas belt. But that suckered coil was around him, tightening steadily about his middle. With two rows of those vacuum cups running the length of the thing—and twenty-five of those vacuum cups in each row—Hall could not force the slimy thing up nor down.

In a few seconds more the monster would have been devouring the unconscious sailor alive. One bite with that horny bill would have torn out the man's throat, but Hall and the other two sailors were struggling desperately and now Admiral Blunt and Old Eternity Bill Mandell were coming into the battle. They yelled like madmen and darted forward. Blunt stooped to pick up a pick-axe one of the sailors had dropped. A tentacle shot forward from the monster. The curling, wet-leather thing closed around Blunt's left ankle, jerking him off his feet. Two of the smaller octopi hurled themselves awkwardly toward him. He cut one of them down with the axe, splitting it through the head. The thing dropped, writhing, tentacles whipping the air. Blunt hacked through the large tentacle then, severing it scarcely a foot from his ankle.

No blood came from that severed tentacle; there were just a few drops of blue ooze, and the piece about Blunt's ankle still remained, a writhing, tightening thing, frog-cold, while the main part of the snaky thing arose, lashing. As if the monster had a thousand brains and equally as many eyes, the big tentacle reached with lightning swiftness for old Eternity Bill.

But Mandell was rushing right in on the thing. His .38 automatic was in his hand. He held it in front of him. In a straight, incredibly swift charge, he was among the sailors. He rammed his automatic straight between the monster's slant eyes, and started pulling the trigger. One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! The shots came like the chattery fire of a machine-gun.

The bullets—some of them, at least—must have penetrated the vital spot. The monster started to sink back into the well, but a mob of blue-jackets were swarming into the place. Some cried out with the sheer terror of touching the thing, but, fighting bull-dogs that they were, they dragged the monster out of the well, banging the yet curling and knotting thing with axes, crow-bars and pinch-bars until it was only a wet mass on the filthy floor.

Suffering the same fate of the older one, the smaller octopi were beaten and cut to pulps. But they were hard to kill. Even when nothing was left of them but stringy strings, pieces of tentacles still writhed and twisted as if searching for something to wreak their wrath upon.

Old Eternity Bill Mandell looked around for Admiral Blunt. Blunt was lying against the wall. The heinous, two-foot piece of tentacle was still fastened to his ankle. Mandell tore the atrocious thing away, hurling it against the wall before its vacuum cups could fasten themselves to his hand.

"Awful! Awful!" Mandell's voice shook as though with a chill. "What a repulsive mess! Did you get hurt, admiral?"

Blunt made no answer. Mandell looked down at him, closely. To his breath-taking amazement, he saw that Admiral Blunt had fainted.

CHAPTER XXXI

A GOD FALLS

AND Yang Po-liang sat alone on the throne. His shriveled-button ears were attuned to every sound; his little eyes were sharp, beady, his old-monkey face lined with fatigue and worry. It came to him to remember that he was old—very old and very tired. Yet Yama still stood there behind him with his big, beautiful belly, and his eyes of the most flawless jade looking down. Yama, the strength of millions, half a million and more of them still living and scattered around the world. Only Yama lived eternally. Earthquakes, fire nor flood could destroy him. For earthquake and fire and flood had tried him. He had stood there since early after the Gold Rush of '49. He had seen the coming and going of many things—and no prowling police with axes in their hands had ever found him, though the earthquake of 1906 had shaken the buildings down above his head, fire had consumed them, and fire-fighters had drenched everything with floods of water.

Yama lived and smiled his bull-god smile. A wise god. All-Seeing, All-Omnipotent, and in whose vitals burned the fire of Everlasting. Yama! The name had a magic spell. Men swore by it, lived by it, and around the world they died by it! For two thousand years and more, yes! For a hundred thousand times that many more years men would go on serving and dying for Yama. The great book, bound with plates of gold half as heavy as a man, said it. By the blood of the Great White Cock, it was so! White devils could come and go, rant and storm, curse their fathers and tear out their hair, but Yama would remain, looking down on the unfaithful.

The white men who would destroy him were like the seven devils of the well—born with a restless fire in their bellies, always snarling, sneering, snapping, snorting! Blood of the goat's vermin, they were an unruly lot! Born to live a little while, then die before their time. Because of their pig-headedness, their hurrying, stamping and incessant meddling!

Like the well devils! Yes, most surely like the well devils. The devils were gone now, dead. Chopped, hacked and slashed to pieces. And it had taken so long to train the old one. Blood of the vermin of seven goats, she had been a devil to manage. From the day she arrived grunting, squealing and struggling in a yellow fisherman's net, she had been the devil to pay. For weeks she had sulked in the bottom of the well. It had taken months before the fool could be taught to come up for food. The restlessness of the sea was in her bloodless vitals—like the white men! And the white men were out there yet. Banging, prying, storming. Would they get to the throne room? Would they tear through seventy years and more of back-breaking work and cunning? Would they discover that they were but yet in the great outer square surrounding the rooms of the throne? There had been many foolish raids before. Always had Yama withstood the attacks.

But there were those infernal blue-jackets to contend with now—and that big *Um Cha* with the half-moon of hair curved around the bald knot of his head. He wanted to *gom fong* somebody. Yes, *jail* somebody! A *gom fong* was all an *Um Cha* could think about. A *gom fong* and a *gwon fu* sitting on a high "bench" to judge this and that and send men away to a bigger *gom fong* where armed men in uniform paced high walls. *Ngok yon jong shee*—Mean men! *Mi chin pi shuang!*—Arsenic soaked in honey! Aye, it dribbled through the very pores of their skins! Always after *Fu tuo tse*—tong men.

Yang Po-liang laughed. A little clay vase of lacquer-pink Chinese spirits sat beside him. He took a thimblet of the stuff, sipping it slowly—and listening.

He never left that throne. He was there until the long night passed. He was there listening to the hammering of axes, the rattle of crow-bars and the steady clawing and prying of pinch-bars. He heard walls fall, slabs of stone come down, and the voices of men getting closer and closer to him.

Unmoving, stirring not a muscle in his dried-up face and body—just sitting there trusting it all to Yama—he was in the throne seat long after daylight had come to the world of streets above him. With eyes as cold as jade, he watched a great slab in the wall in front of him. A crack, like a hair-line scratch across glass, had taken place from the incessant hammering and battering on the opposite side of the slab. The crack lengthened, broadened. New cracks branched away from it, crawling and shaping like a spider's web in the making. A white spot grew into being—an ugly, shapeless thing, growing there in the slab.

The white devils were at hand.

Yet Yang Po-liang did not move. Not a muscle stirred. By the law he had lived. By the law he would die. It was written that if harm should come to his temple, the master of it would remain like a captain clinging to the wheel of a sinking ship. Inwardly, he smiled. Blood of the goat's vermin, what could those white devils do to him! Where was, after all, their proof? He had a tongue in his head. By the blood of the Great White Cock, he would use it to deny everything in connection with the outer passages!

And there he sat when a swarm of sailors broke through the wall and the big slab—no longer strong enough to stand the blows and prying—came down with a breaking crash and a cloud of dust. Not a muscle moved in Yang Po-liang's face. Not an eyelid flickered.

* * * *

"Whistling Hannah!" cried a sailor. "Look what we've found!"

Mandell and Admiral Blunt, their faces grimy with dirt and perspiration, pushed through the opening. Blunt looked none the worse for the dead-faint that had come over him in the dome of the monsters, but he was still smarting under the thought of it. It had been a most unrighteous thing—flopping down like that in front of his men. He could almost hear what Holly would say about such a thing—"The very idea of a vice-admiral of the Pacific Fleet falling down in a swoon like that!" And—if he ever saw her again—she would be certain to bring it up at some time when she needed him for somebody's fool dinner party.

"Looks like we've struck the guts of the thing, admiral." Mandell spoke at his elbow. "Gods of gods, this looks like the king dodo bird of them all."

Even the sailors had halted. They stood there staring. Altar-bowls were giving off a soft, pleasing light. Streaks of incense smoke crawled lazily toward the high ceiling. The sight was awesome to say the least. There was something terrible and shocking about it. It gave off an atmosphere of something long-dead, something ghastly. The very air seemed charged with superstition. Some of the sailors stepped back a pace. It was as though they had violated something, some curse of the tomb of a long-buried Pharaoh who was now about to reach out from the forgotten centuries and demand inescapable atonement for their sinful coming and tearing to disturb a silence blessed by the gods of old.

For surely the thing in front of them was a god sitting there on a little throne with that huge, bull-headed thing standing guard behind him. Such an old little god in his gorgeous robes of silk and gold. For a minute even Mandell and Blunt were silent. One sailor actually took off his cap.

It took the blustering Hall to find out that Yang Po-liang was a man and not a statue sitting there. Hall prodded him in the belly with a pinch-bar, and Yang Po-liang came to life with the scream of a toothless old woman.

"Kai Dai!" he screamed. *"Chock lou!*—Damned fool! Robber! *Hul soung!*—Watch out!"

"So you're alive, so you're alive!" chuckled Mandell, barging his huge figure forward. "Well now, mister, this is perfectly delightful. There are several things in the way of questions we would like to have you answer ——"

"Away!" screeched the little old man. "Do not lay your hands upon me, vermin of the goat! I know not why you have come here disturbing the sacred silence of Yama!"

"No?" Blunt's voice .was suddenly roaring.

"Maybe, you old buzzard, you can inform us how this came here!"

He thrust Holly's bracelet under Yang Po-liang's nose.

"Talk!"

"What is the bauble?" Yang Po-liang leaned forward, looking at the bracelet. "A gewgaw! A showy trinket! What matters a thing like that to me? I never saw the thing before. I am an old man minding my business here ——"

"And attending a flock of octopi in a well out yonder, I suppose?" cut in Mandell.

"Eh?" Yang Po-liang looked at him with eyes as innocent as a baby's. "What foolery is this you talk, *Um Cha?* I know of nothing more than you see here. Am I the keeper of all the city and its gates? This is the Seventh Temple of Yama, a brotherhood of the Orient ——"

"And just the place we're looking for!" shot in Mandell. "Go ahead, boys!" He turned to the sailors. Another swarm of them were coming through the opening in the wall. "Tear hell out of it. It may take a week or a month ——"

"Wait!" shrilled Yang Po-liang, throwing up hands and arms that were like skeleton paws as his funnel-like sleeves slipped back to his shoulders. "By all that is sacred, *Um Cha* ——"

"How do you know I'm a detective?" snapped Mandell.

"I—I do not know!" cried Yang Po-liang. "Yet, fool, I can guess and suppose. But wait! *Wait!*" Sailors were moving closer to the altar with axes and their prying tools. "Wait, vermin of goats! Touch this throne and the curse of Hell is upon you! I swear it. By the blood of the Great White Cock, I swear it!"

They bullied him. They even coaxed him. After all, there was the slight chance of a mistake. The well of the octopi was at least three hundred feet away. The room where the slow-bleeding girl was found was an equal distance. With all those walls and passages between the places, it was possible that they had blundered into a different *tong's* temple. But Mandell was a man to make sure.

"Show us all your temple," he ordered. "Every foot of it, old man, or down comes your bull-headed idol."

"Move!" roared Blunt. "Do what he says! What in hell are you waiting for?"

And Yang Po-liang showed them. He turned extremely polite, awfully apologetic. He even offered them a nip of his spirits, only to have them refuse the stuff. He showed them the way inside of Yama and down the stairs while Hall and another sailor climbed the iron ladder to the platform inside the head and stared out through holes in the jade eyes.

Mandell grew polite. Now and then he even apologized. It was all probably a most awful mistake, one that the government would settle for in due time. It was a big tricky man and a little tricky man playing each other. Blunt followed them, scowling, smacking his lips and out of patience with it all. Yang Po-liang even read Mandell a passage from a little book bound in gold, which he carried in one of the pockets of his robes. Yama was a benevolent organization, one formed for the mutual benefit of its members; one that instructed its members to obey the laws of America and make them loyal and understanding citizens.

It was nice. So very nice! And Old Eternity Bill Mandell was so sorry. Oh, so sorry! Yang Po-liang led him from room to room below Yama. They were innocent enough. Some were recreation chambers, harmless enough at a glance. One used his imagination. One used his imagination when he was led to rooms that told him they were the rooms of women. One in particular struck Mandell's fancy and brought from him another spontaneous flow of apologies. It was such a nice room. Small but quaint. A couch covered with a golden cloth stood in the corner. There were cushions on the floor. An odor of perfume still clung to the air. On a small table there were crayons and pencils. On the walls there were childish drawings—of moons and suns, of hillsides and flowers, a crude house with a well at its corner, and something representing a farmer's field stretching away in the distance. It was nice, so nice a spirit of sadness hung like a cloak over the room.

* * * *

"All right," ordered Mandell when he returned to the throne room. His voice had suddenly gone icy-cold. "Tear hell out of it, boys."

"What? What is this thing you say, *Um Cha?*" Yang Po-liang was suddenly gripped with terror. "You mean ——"

"That we're shooting your little play-house all to glory, mister!" answered Mandell flatly. "I've seen enough of this place to know that I am still in the right pew. Produce Holly Blunt and Captain Lee, damn you!" Mandell seized him by the throat, hurling him to the floor. "That rug down at the foot of the stairs is soaked with blood. On a nail-head coming up the stairs I found a little piece of the dress Holly Blunt was wearing the night she was abducted. The nice little room down there belongs to a girl we found with her veins tapped so that she would spend hours and hours bleeding to death ——"

"And," put in the voice of Buck Stone as he came through the opening in the wall, "out here under a slab in the floor of a passage we've found a regular mass of dead men, Eternity. Among them are the bodies of Wu Fong Sam and the lipless giant."

"Let me at that old devil!" Blunt was lunging forward. "I'll tear his lungs out!"

It undoubtedly set a precedent for admirals of the Navy when four of Blunt's sailors seized him and held him. He roared at them like a grizzly bear in a trap, but they held on to him, struggling with him.

"I'll court martial every damned one of you!" he thundered. "I—I'll ——"

"Do nothing, admiral!" commanded Mandell, rising from the now limp form of Yang Po-liang. "You know it and I know it. The boys are doing the exact thing sensible fellows should do. Besides, I banged our old-monkey fellow a shade too hard on the floor. He's knocked as cold as your cocked hat."

Altar-bowls were flying now. A group of sailors had gone to work on the base of Yama. Others were banging the walls, sounding them with axes and prying into tiny cracks with their crow-bows. Only by digging into the very heart of everything that stood in front of them could they get to the bottom of the secrets of this hell-hole of torture. But years of standing there had done something to the idol's base. The fourth or fifth blow of the axes shook Yama. There was a creaking and groaning of old wood. Something snapped like chalk. A sailor screeched a warning.

"Look out!"

It seemed to jerk Yang Po-liang back to his senses. With his old-woman cry, he was lurching to his feet. At a glance he saw what was happening. Yama was leaning forward, slowly, surely, the jade eyes leering. Beneath his base, breaking with the noise of a crackling fire, more timbers were giving way after so many years of supporting the half-dozen tons-weight of the idol.

Yang Po-liang screeched again. An old, old monkey, he darted forward. No one dared to stop him.

Straight in front of the falling idol, he ran. He halted there, lifting his hands.

"Yama! Yama!" he screamed. *"Yama!"*

And still smiling his bull-god smile, the jade eyes laughing their basilisk laugh, Yama came on down. He was like some monster swallowing a man. He struck little Yang Po-liang. There was a splintering, reverberating crash. The great room shook. Swarming clouds of dust filled it; and somewhere beneath all those tons of wreckage, the broken, battered figure of Yang Po-liang was lying. . . .

CHAPTER XXXII

THE THREE VONS

IT WAS a strange company in the deep basement room of the old, dark stone house on a towering headland thrust out into the sea a short two hours ride by automobile north of San Francisco. There sat Holly Blunt, Captain Andrew Lee, and Mr. Y. Takahasha. Behind them sat Whang Sut Soon and Dr. Rodin Lafferty. In a few moments Lee had seen that the Japanese consulate was sitting with his hands behind him. A short time later Lee was to learn that Takahasha had been brought along aboard the *Saluta* with him and Holly. Still later, he was to hear the story of how Y. Takahasha had been made a prisoner in his own home—and by his own servant, the Japanese Lee had seen in the Seventh Temple of Yama.

It was a good house. For many special reasons it was a good house. Forests of redwood and pine half-surrounded the broad grounds with their thick-stone walls and spiked-iron fences. It was four miles to the nearest highway, four miles through a forest as black as ink at night, and with no neighbors within a dozen miles in either direction. It was like some lonely fort there, standing three hundred feet high on its great, blunt arm of earth and stone and timber with the raging sea snarling and cannonading at its foot. Northeast of it, hugged in by giant reefs, was a blue lagoon a thousand yards long and half a thousand wide, deep enough to berth any ship that ever sailed the ocean—a lagoon that held its own jealously guarded secret with the old house there on the headland.

The room was long and low, ceiled and panelled in deeply carved redwood. Its recessed walls were lined with worn leather tomes, a few old manuscripts, and odds and ends of antiques that gave it the air of a musty curio shop in the basement of some ancient city. In the low rough rock fireplace flames lolled lazily over three short cuts of pine logs, and cast weird shadows over the face of the man who had just slid his tall figure into a chair at the end of the massive table.

"Nice party!" Captain Felix von Ziegler's smoky dark eyes narrowed. He spoke with an affected Oxford whang. "I am delighted beyond expression with our—er—shall I say hostess?" He glanced at Holly Blunt, smiled, and looked back at Lee with a slight frown pinching the corners of his ample mouth. It widened into an arrogant grin. "I trust, Captain Lee, that you are flattered by the company. They tell me you are a deucedly clever scamp when it comes to making a bit of trouble."

Captain Felix von Ziegler had a keen appreciation for many things, and one of these was for the soft light of the basement room. It was an obsession and had been since the awful days and nights of the World War when he had been forced to spend weeks at a stretch prowling about the North Sea in search of Allied shipping. The inevitable stink of burned oil and the tingling bite of acid-gas in the narrow, ever-confining quarters aboard the U-boats had been a curse to many officers and men of the Imperial German Navy.

Von Ziegler was a massive man, still, with a full, dark face covered with a short heavy beard. He was more than six feet tall. His chest was broad and deep, his neck thick and stumpy, advertising a bull-like strength. His eyes were smoky-dark and full, the eyes of a dreamer, dull at one moment, startlingly magnetic at the next. His nose was long and Roman, reminding one of a Cossack's curving blade. Splatters of gray were at his temples. The rest of his hair was coarse and dark, cow-licked above the right eye and roaching backward stubbornly.

The heavy door at the north end of the room opened, and Lieutenant Bruno von Schiller came into the room, fresh from a bath and his morning shave. He was still in his gray bathrobe. A Russian cigarette drooped from the left corner of his mouth, the smoke curling about his long, hooked nose. His black eyes looked tired, restless and dark-pocketed beneath as if he had slept during the night in a drunken stupor.

Lieutenant Friedrich von Rheim came in a few minutes later, pudgy face a trifle flushed, blond hair still damp from his tub, blue eyes a bit bleary. Wearing a gray-flannel shirt, black breeches and English riding boots, he leaned against the wall at the left side of the fireplace. He looked anything but pleased with the assemblage in front of him. Captain von Ziegler noticed it, frowned again, and spoke to him in English.

"Well, *herr* Friedrich, I suppose you are sulking because your confounded horsebacking is spoiled for the morning?" He laughed flatly. "Yet, *herr* Friedrich, is not the company most charming?" He waved a big hand toward Holly Blunt. "Why, old chap, ——"

"It vass dangerous pizness!" Von Rheim's interrupting voice was flat.

"Of course!" Von Schiller looked at him with an unfriendly twinkle in his eyes. He spoke in a decidedly American voice. "Eating, sleeping, drinking and riding are all a dangerous 'pizness' to you, *herr* Friedrich. You should have remained where you were born so that your mother could look after you. Should you always frown? *Himmel,* if we but borrow a pinch of company ——"

"Borgen macht Sorgen!" sneered von Rheim.

"We are not making war among South Americans now. We are not in the pay of a Sandino and his supporters, nor are we dealing with natives of the type we had to handle in the Nicaraguan revolution. We deal with brains here, gentlemen, not three-quarter savages hiding about in jungles."

"True, true, my friend!" Von Schiller's eyes narrowed. "But we have your most splendid brain on our side. It will, no doubt, point a way out of every difficulty encountered in our little plot. Perhaps you will again make a suggestion, say—er—like the suggestion you made to drive a torpedo into the side of that British tramp coming down the coast a few hours before we sank the Shonosuke."

"It would have given the Japs more courage!" snapped von Rheim. "They would have felt that the British were angered with the Americans ——"

"And so often before have I told you," cut in Captain von Ziegler, "that it would be impossible to make the damned British and these infernal Americans go to war with each other."

"You are right, positively right!" agreed von Schiller. "At all times you are right on that subject! The British and the Americans may bristle at each other, my friend," he looked coldly at von Rheim, "but that is as far as it will ever go. Look how the Americans came against us. Did they enter that war for the sake of the French or the Italians? No! They had no real business in that war, but they saw that the snarling old British lion was about to get his back tossed against the wall. And that will always be the case, my smart fellow—Americans going to the British or the British coming to the Americans. Either may keep on the fence, so to speak, for a long time, but let one of them start to totter and you will hear the eagle scream or the old lion roar as they dash into the thick of the fighting."

"They fought each other before!" A sneer crossed von Rheim's none-too-handsome face.

"And neither are proud of it, my wild fire," chuckled Captain von Ziegler. "Besides, it was all in the family, and even idiots know enough to keep out of family affairs."

"I did not insinuate that we could bring about war between the United States and the British Empire!" snapped von Rheim, a scarlet flush creeping into his cheeks. "I said it would encourage the Japanese!"

"Foolish talk!" grimaced von Schiller. "As much use as wind blowing in an empty bottle!"

"And," sneered von Rheim, "you have about as many brains as the bottle, my friend!"

"For the love of God!" Captain von Ziegler slapped the table a jarring blow with the palm of his hand. "Must you two always quarrel? Never have I known the time when you failed to find time for it! Once when we were lying in the bottom of the sea and half the British Fleet racing about over our heads ——"

"We quarrel, yes!" agreed von Schiller with his flat old Teutonic laugh. "At least, *herr* Captain, it gave us something to do besides sitting there in the darkness of a temporarily disabled submarine and wondering when a depth-charge was going to find us."

True, they had quarreled many times. They had been through hell together a number of times. It seemed written in their foreheads that they would go through hell together many more times. In each of their memories was the memory of a "captain's last supper" one raw December night when their U-Boat lay on the floor of the North Sea. They would never forget that. In each man's brain was burned the indelible picture of a mere stub of grease-globuled candle burning on the long mess table and the ghastly lines of heart-broken faces in an ungodly still glow of sickly-yellow light. Captain Felix von Ziegler had been at his best that night, standing there at the head of the table, making his last speech with a glass of rich-red wine, poisoned by his own hand, sitting in front of him. Captain von Ziegler had been even a little gay that night there on the bottom of the sea. A grimy-faced engineer down the table had actually laughed, and that laugh had taken some of the awful look of dread out of the eyes of the rest of the officers and crew gathered there at the table and staring at the blood-red glasses of death in front of them.

It had been the end. Each man had known he was through; each man had known that the time to die had come. The wine was like blood there on that table, not the blood of life, but the cold, dark-red blood of death, and each glass made even darker by a few drops from the little brown bottle with a tiny German battle-flag and a narrow strip of black ribbon tied in a neat bow around its neck—that little bottle that Captain Felix von Ziegler had held so jauntily in his right hand.

The air was stuffy and hot, hot even beneath a half-frozen sea. The silence was as cold and spiritless as a dead man's smile. Captain Felix von Ziegler's voice had sounded hollow in the gloom of that tomb of steel with the cold sea above and all around and stars glittering like frozen candles catching the light of the moon still higher up in the frosty blue dome of the sky. Yet Captain Felix von Ziegler had told them all a joke, a ribald joke that a ribald crew such as the men before him liked. Something about an American admiral and a little French dancing girl playing hard on her luck on the streets of Paris. Damned if von Rheim could ever remember it. He had afterwards tried hard enough, though he had never mentioned it. The memory of that night there on the bottom of the North Sea had been something all of them had wanted to forget. Yet the story had made the engineer laugh. Something had come from that laugh. Not a minute afterward, with the men all there at the table ready to down their wine, the lights had come on weakly. A tiny but powerful electric motor had started humming somewhere in the disabled craft. Glasses and wine had been dashed to the floor not a moment too late. For some reason the gods had smiled. The men went back to their work. At last, with every man dying on his feet for air, the U-Boat had quivered once more with life. The ballast pumps had started, and like a half-dead fish the submarine had climbed back to the surface of the sea to find that the English Fleet had left the scene.

It had done something to the three vons. They had worked their sadly misbehaving craft back to a submarine base out of reach of the English Fleet. Repairs had been made, and while they were being made the names of the three vons and their bravery of the deep had seeped to every nook and corner of Germany. Music halls sang of them. The High Command covered their brawny chests with medals. In the end they were given the command of a larger and much faster submarine, and ordered away on a wild mission half-around the earth—to the Pacific Ocean and a secret supply base on the northwestern coast of South America.

Slipping like a ghost through blockades, keeping delayed appointments with supply ships, three times reported lost to the High Command, the vons had made the voyage, had come around Cape Horn in the wildest storms that ever blew, and, at last, had reached their base a short week before the final, all-crushing blows of the Allies had defeated Germany on land and sea to bring an end to the long war.

It had been a blow to the vons. It had been a blow to those half-mad hellions of the deep who had sailed with them. Hawks of the sea they were, restless hawks, schooled only in war and how to make and live it. It was their meat and blood, their food and drink.

They had raised hell in South America. They had started one revolution after another. Armies had revolted and re-revolted. Presidents had been assassinated. Whole cabinets had been routed and sent scurrying out of their countries like mice fleeing the claws of a horde of hungry cats. High politicians had hung from the limbs of the nearest trees, and the buzzards had grown fat on the leavings.

For a time it had been jolly good business, starting this fight and that for a dozen years or so. There had been wine, women and song, a pinch of loot hither and yon, and spurts of howling-mad adventure now and then. But things like that grow tame to men who have fought through a real war.

There was that secret supply base to think about, lying there on the South American Coast in a lonely cove and choked to the guts with all the good tools so dear to an underwater sea fighter's heart. But it was not until the Japanese invaded Shanghai to shoot civilians and soldiers alike that the fire of revenge started burning in certain old men of China, and then had come the offer—backed by the money and full-support of a half a million members of a *tong* two thousand years old—to make war between America and Japan.

Really, it promised high adventure that would equal the fighting of the old North Sea.

"Shut up!" roared Captain Felix von Ziegler. *"Get out! Gott in himmel,* what a pair of quarrelsome louts! Go soak your heads—or *sit down!"*

Von Rheim and Von Schiller sat down. Captain von Ziegler glared at Captain Lee.

"Food for thought, eh?" he smiled. " 'The damned Huns!' You people were fond of the title during the war, Lee. Deucedly fond of it, especially when we torpedoed your ships ——"

"As," cut in Lee, "you torpedoed the Japanese ships as well as an American vessel ——"

"In San Francisco Bay!" cut in von Ziegler with a smile. "Clever, eh?"

"Yes, very!"

"And you will admit, will you not, old ass, that we have almost succeeded in tying you into a right sweet war with Japan?"

"Only you have failed!" snapped Lee.

"For the moment, perhaps." Captain von Ziegler laughed, leaning forward to rest his thick forearms on the table. "Temporarily! I have had these to contend with." He waved his hand toward Whang Sut Soon and Dr. Lafferty. "Their bungling bartering! Their downright stupidity at times. We now have more elaborate plans, old ass. Captain Felix von

Ziegler—the 'damned Hun,' if it pleases you!—will show these men how the work is done. The issue will be forced. While Washington and Tokyo sit and quarrel, Captain Felix von Ziegler will get action. You have already seen the metal of the Japs. Bluff and bluffers! They want no war with America! They want war with no country unless it is what you Americans call a push-over. Eh, right, Takahasha?"

He turned to the Japanese consulate with a sneer. Takahasha only looked at him.

"Look at you now!" Captain von Ziegler laughed harshly. "Your wings are clipped. Your strut is gone. It was me—*me!*" he slapped his broad chest, "who ordered that you be taken from your home and hauled away in a laundry wagon like a bundle of soiled linen. Now the papers and broadcasting stations are howling the news that Mr. Takahasha has mysteriously disappeared from his home, that he was last seen about thirty-six hours ago! And why do we want you? My dear Takahasha," he touched the man on the knee, "all that and more you will learn before we are through with you. It will not be just another case of Admiral Takemura and Mr. Ishikawa. You, my friend, will remain alive. Oh, for days, perhaps. Perhaps even for weeks."

He paused to light a cigarette. For a minute he sat there puffing it. A strange, half-wild gleam kindled in his eyes. He stood up suddenly. He walked behind Y. Takahasha's chair.

"I am surprised beyond measure at my Chinese friends." Von Ziegler laughed suddenly. "They have so many elaborate things to make men obey their wishes. During the late war—the one, Mr. Takahasha, in which your country decided to take sides against us—we Huns," he glanced at Lee and sneered, "learned many things. Prisoners obeyed us. Oh, yes!" He laughed. "Very quickly. And suppose now, my dear Takahasha, I should ask you to write a certain thing—a note, we shall say, that—er—accidentally falls into the hands of the President of the United States and certain congressmen? A note, we shall say, sealed and signed with all due formality, by your own hand as consulate of your country—a note showing conclusively that it is Japan, herself, making all the excuses to bring about war ——"

"I have had the matter brought to my attention long before this," cut in Takahasha. "It is, as the Americans would say it," he glanced at Lee, "a waste of wind to discuss it."

"Deucedly nice of you, old chap! Yet, my dear Takahasha, the commander of a U-boat has never discussed it with you. Suppose, Takahasha, that you allow me the privilege of demonstrating the procedure we used so successfully in demanding certain things from prisoners in the North Sea. I am certain, my dear fellow, that you will find it exceedingly delightful." He was smiling broadly now. "Permit me!"

With that, he plucked back Y. Takahasha's collar, and dropped his burning cigarette down the man's back.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE MONSTER OF THE DEEP

Y. TAKAHASHA screamed. He screamed exactly like a woman. He came out of his chair with a leap. He fell upon the floor, trying to roll. His eyes were actually bulging. Twisting and writhing he came up, flinching, still crying out in a sharp voice. Von Rheim darted toward him. Captain von Ziegler shouted him back to his chair.

"Let him play around a little!" he barked. *"Himmel,* would you deny a guest his trifling pleasures?"

Sick at his stomach, still weak from the mauling he had received in the Seventh Temple of Yama after the giant Kai Dai had thrown him to the floor, Captain Lee jerked himself to his feet. Getting up and falling, Takahasha was close to him now. Lee put his foot in the middle of the man's back, rubbing it with the sole of his shoe. It was the only thing he could do for the helpless Takahasha. After a half-minute, Takahasha looked up and tried to smile.

"Thank—you,—Captain Lee!" His voice was a series of gasps.

"I am sorry, Mr. Takahasha!" Lee spoke sharply. He was about to say something else, something about the crowning brutality of such a thing, but a warning shake of the head by Holly Blunt stopped him.

"The old 'Hun' way, eh, Lee?" Captain von Ziegler was looking at Lee with laughing eyes. "It never failed us in the good old days." He rubbed his hands. "Once there was a woman, young and quite pretty, the wife of a captain of a Dutchman off the Irish Coast ——"

"If it's all the same," cut in Lee, "I wouldn't care to hear it!"

"—— a sweet creature," Captain von Ziegler was going right on, smiling at Holly Blunt, "with a strong head. She objected quite strenuously to the sinking of her husband's ship. Claiming neutrality and all that. By Joe, she was a Trojan! Kicked and bit and clawed. You see, more than she objected to the sinking of the ship, her husband's first command, by the way, she objected to the charming necessity of leaving her husband on our deck while we submerged. Well, as I was about to say, pardon my wandering, Miss Blunt, she ——"

"Please!" cut in Holly. *"Please.* Haven't we had enough for now? There is such a thing, you know, as mercy. We are absolutely helpless, unable to lift even a finger ——"

"Ah, how true!" Captain von Ziegler bowed with a politeness that was nothing short of mockery. "How stupid of me, my dear. I am an unpardonable host. Forgive me! You shall have rest—and a bite of breakfast. By Jove, yes! Take them below." He looked at von Schiller and von Rheim. "The Jap with them, also."

He walked to the wall to the left of the fireplace. He did something, touched something so quickly that Captain Lee, standing there behind him, failed to see it. There was a muffled *clack-tack* of the bolt of a heavy lock shifting. A panel six feet high and four feet wide, the center of it taken up with shelves of old books, swung outward, revealing a brass-railed platform at the head of a brass railed flight of circular stairs.

"Go ahead!" ordered von Ziegler, already having switched on the flashlight. His tone had become metallic and sour again. He stood a little to one side of the opening. "Follow the stairs."

It was exactly like going down a steep stairway in the square, rock-walled shaft of a mine. The stairs kept turning until they were down thirty feet. An oak door, reinforced with strips of iron, stood in front of Lee, Holly and Takahasha now.

"Push it with your shoulder!" ordered von Schiller. "It's not fastened."

Lee shoved open the door. Instantly the baying of dogs started. Lee hesitated there in the doorway. Holly cowered back against Takahasha. Von Schiller cursed them, and pushed them on rudely. He touched an electric switch to the right. A cave-like room was bathed in the bright light of a half-dozen bulbs set in the rocky ceiling. To the right and left were barrels and boxes and racks of wines, whiskies and liqueurs. Four huge yellow dogs, vicious brutes with gleaming teeth and fireballs of eyes, were straining forward on chains in the shadows of the bottle racks. Von Schiller silenced them with a sharp, rasped-out oath.

"Hans! Fritz!" he snapped. "Katje! Ada! Dry up! Damn you!"

The dogs turned, slinking back under the racks. One of them whimpered as if in protest. Lee walked straight on. It looked as if he was going to walk right into a giant cask, but von Rheim darted in front of him and touched something, some hidden contrivance about the brass-bound hoops of the cask. There was another muffled sound of a lock's bolt. The cask moved to one side. They entered a damp passageway that wound its way downward in the earth and was lighted by electric bulbs set thirty or forty feet apart in the low ceiling.

They were entering the main room of a mammoth cavern a few minutes later. Lighted by powerful electric bulbs it was like an awesome amphitheatre, a hundred and fifty feet high to the coral-red ceiling. The place was all of five hundred feet long and two hundred and fifty feet wide. It was floored by a gigantic pool of deep, blue salt-water. From somewhere came the perpetual roar of the sea, subdued to the faint, far-away thunder of an express train.

But it was the thing Lee saw directly in front of him a shock that travelled from the ends of his toes to the top of his bare head. It was a long, gray thing, torpedo-shaped and lying like a huge shark floating belly-up in the quiet water.

"For some time, my friends," laughed Bruno von Schiller, following along behind Takahasha, "you have been seeking this little toy. Now you will have the opportunity of boarding her."

"But—but," Lee could not help the question, "how do you get the thing out of here?"

"It is very simple!" laughed von Schiller. "The water in here is over a hundred feet deep. There is a great hole in the wall that leads to the lagoon. The water is almost dead-still. All we do," he shrugged, "is to submerge, glide like a shark into the lagoon—and then the sea. Simple, is it not?"

And then he laughed.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GREEN LIGHTS AT SEA

DR. RODIN LAFFERTY had the most to lose, and he was a nervous man. There were so many things to think about, and looming more than all the other thoughts that haunted him was the thought of Dark Flower. How much did she know? How much would she dare to tell? Would the old law of Yama hold her? It was a hard law, a terrible law, one that would reach to each and every one of her relatives—only, damn it! she had no relatives. The small-pox had seen to that. The more Dr. Lafferty thought of it as the long morning dwindled away and late-afternoon came, the more the thought haunted him.

He tried to make the vons and Whang Sut Soon see the danger. But what did the vons care! Glory to God, all they had to do was to board their submarine and put to sea! A little matter of thirty minutes to get under way. Their infernal boat was always ready, always supplied. Its cruising radius was almost six thousand miles. It had been one of the Imperial German Navy's boats of pride, built at Kiel and for long-cruising. The vons laughed at fear and snapped their fingers at threats. Lafferty took another injection of morphine each time he argued with them—and he hated morphine. It was the devil's own curse, an octopus that would soon eat the heart and blood out of any man. He had dabbled with the infernal stuff for ten years. Twice he had had to go away where he was unknown to get himself a "cure"—and cures never were cures. The curse always came back. . . .

He talked to Whang Sut Soon alone, and Whang Sut Soon was scared. The infernal news broadcasting stations had seen to that. They had told story after story, and they had come in over the radio in the big living room of the old house there on the headland. The Seventh Temple of Yama was gone, wrecked, Mr. Yang Po-liang was dead; the aged keeper of a cat-shop was in jail; a pretty girl—an Oriental beauty, the radio said—was in a hospital with Federal agents guarding her; and more arrests were being made in Chinatown; and there was a decided showing of friendliness warming between the commanders of the Japanese cruisers in the bay and Vice Admiral Beauregard Blunt. Something had happened. The men broadcasting the news could not learn exactly what it was, but they expected to know at any minute. And—oh, yes!—they would inform the public. . . .

Darkness finally settled, crawling out to sea in gathering veils of fog. Dr. Lafferty paced the living room, or stood for long minutes at a time staring out on the ocean through the bay windows of the living room. Laffertys before him had stared out those windows, watching that same slow-heaving and slow-falling sea curving great half-moons of silvery water about the ragged feet of the headland.

The vons got drunk. It was a nightly habit to drink and drink and drink. And when they were drunk they sang. Bloody songs of the war, obscene songs of the streets of Paris, Berlin, and songs of the sea. There were always songs of women—women as wild and uncaring as themselves; and sometimes there was a song about the nuns of a certain strip of captured French territory—a ribald song that shook the rafters until the dust gathered by a half-century came down. They were a don't-give-a-damn trio, officers of that old school of Teutonic Kultur. Salt-of-the-earth! All else was dirt beneath their feet.

They were howling and storming drunk at seven o'clock. They were in the living room, goose-stepping arm and arm now, and old Ng Choy—the Chinaman who waited on them hand and foot—was running back and forth with bottles. They were a most disgusting sight. Even Whang Sut Soon, whose patience was always a marvel, sneered at them. They were singing anything and everything now. They even sang the *Star Spangled Banner*—and sang it with gusto, just as if they liked it! In a few minutes they were roaring away with *Mademoiselle from Armentieres.*

It took a giant sea-plane drumming overhead to sober them. And sober them it did when the plane circled like a great hawk, dipped until it was skimming the sea, and came back to ease down in the lagoon. A few minutes later a searchlight was playing over the old house and grounds. Another plane was coming then. Like the first it circled, swooped, skimmed out over the sea, and came into the lagoon. A third one could be heard coming when Dr. Lafferty looked out to sea and screeched with terror. For out to sea, green as dragon eyes, three starboard lights had appeared. The very speed at which they were travelling told Lafferty that they were not the lights of ordinary ships, and he knew them for what they were, the starboard lights of fighting ships—U. S. destroyers.

CHAPTER XXXV

"KAMERAD!"

LEE heard them coming. For two long hours he had been expecting some one to come. Marched down a narrow gang-plank and aboard the submarine, Lee, Holly and Takahasha had found the craft in charge of four Germans, four South Americans and seven or eight Chinese. The Germans had taken charge of them. Helped down through the conning tower, they had been immediately marched forward, through a regular doll-house kitchen, two officer-compartments, the torpedo chamber, and on into a narrow, airless box of a hole almost in the very nose of the craft. Locked in with a water-tight door, they were almost suffocated when the Germans finally brought them bowls of a thick, half-cold soup and a pot of stale coffee. Both the soup and the coffee tasted of oil.

For submarines sweat oil. It sweats from every ladder rung. It seeps from every bulkhead. And it was that oil that had helped Lee. That oil and Holly Blunt and Mr. Y. Takahasha. Wet with the stuff in an hour, even rubbing it off the bulkhead and getting it smeared all over his hands and wrists, it had helped a great deal when Lee lay on the floor suffering with agony while Holly and Takahasha rolled back to back to him and pulled and tugged at the chain on his left wrist. It had broken his thumb and torn off half the skin in spite of the blood and oil. But it had released that left hand, leaving a dozen inches of stout chain dangling from the wrist of his right.

That short piece of chain had been disastrous to the two half-drunken bullies who had opened that tight door at five o'clock. Lee and Holly Blunt had tricked them. The girl had been lying on the floor as if in a stupor. Having no fear of their chained prisoners, the two men had stepped inside the compartment. Both had been foolish enough to bend over Holly at the same time and with the swiftness of a striking eagle, Lee had slapped them sprawling with two furious blows to their heads.

The rest had been a matter of fast foot-work to get back to the main compartment just aft of the conning tower. Lee had gone there like a shot. Only one man had been in his way, a stupid, half-asleep fellow lying on a locker with a greasy coat under his head. One blow of that swinging chain had finished the man. Lee had been at the steel door of the main compartment, then, slamming the door shut and throwing the cleats in place. With it fastened in a second, he darted up the steel ladder through the conning tower. He went down the deck to an open man-hole, and had not been a second too soon. A South American was climbing out of it, and for the fourth time the chain struck down its man with the quickness of a bullet. With both after-deck man-holes made fast from above, Lee had gone back into the conning tower. He had taken more time with the door, tightening all the cleat-lugs until the door was actually watertight. He had gone forward then, dragging the man he had struck down at the locker with him.

With Holly and Takahasha out of the stuffy, oily compartment and the three unconscious men bolted in it in their place, Lee had searched the officers' compartments almost desperately for a gun of some sort. There were lockers on the bulkheads. He had felt certain that they contained weapons of some sort, but they were locked, and as the engine room was beyond the main compartment, there were no tools with which to break into the things.

Hand grenade cases were found in the torpedo compartments. One by one Lee had opened them, meeting with one disappointment after another until he came to the last one. There, probably overlooked during the war-making and fighting of the vons in South America, he had found three of the dangerous things.

He had tried to find something with which he could release Holly and Takahasha, and had failed. He had helped them up through the conning tower. They had tried to find a way out of the infernal cavern then. The main way was there, plain enough, but there had been no way of opening the iron-bound door against the giant cask unless it would have been to bomb it with one of the hand grenades—and that was entirely too dangerous. They had decided to go back to the safety of the conning tower and wait.

And waiting there in the conning tower, they heard them coming. Lee did not expect them all. Keeping low, watching over the rim of the conning tower while Holly and Takahasha lay on a grating below him, he saw Dr. Lafferty first. Lafferty looked like a wild man. It was as though his eyes came first and the doctor followed them. They were so big, so luminous. His mouth was wide open. His face looked like the face of a ghost.

Right behind Dr. Lafferty, carrying a huge leather sea-bag covered with rubber under one arm and a polo saddle, bridle and blanket under the other, was Lieutenant Friedrich von Rheim. Behind him was Takahasha's servant, then Lieutenant Bruno von Schiller, carrying two leather bags and a sea-bag. Behind him was Whang Sut Soon, excited now. Ng Choy was next. Captain Felix von Ziegler was the last man. Lee really expected him to be the last man. He was so cool, so collected. He carried a suitcase in one hand. Under the other arm was a case of brandy.

"Plenty of time!" he sang out in a voice born to command at sea. "Plenty of time. *Gott in himmel,* are we going to a fire?"

Dr. Lafferty was half-way down the narrow gangplank when Captain Lee's voice stopped him as still as a blast from Gabriel's trumpet.

"Just a moment, doctor!" All the misery and waiting of death was in that voice. "It's my turn now. I've been the down-dog a long time, doctor. Stop! I'll blow you all to hell!"

Lafferty stopped. Most doctors are shaking cowards when it comes to death. Perhaps they have drawn too many men out of the "pickle barrel." They laugh at the sight of "the other" man's blood. They shake when they think of their own. And Lafferty stopped, shaking.

For there stood Lee, waiting, poised, a grenade in his hand, his eyes two slits from which a glint emanated like wickedly dancing lights. Lafferty's eyes bulged. A hoarse cry broke from his lips. He flinched back, colliding with Friedrich von Rheim. A snarl came from the German.

"Easy, doctor!" There was something pleading in Lee's voice. "I've killed enough on this job as it is! Don't make me kill you all in a pile!"

"Vass iss!" That was Captain Felix von Ziegler's voice, accented heavily now by excitement suddenly giving way from the grip of an iron hand. "Vass iss!"

"It's my turn!" Andrew Lee was saying. "Don't die like drowning rats flung in the ocean in a trap! You haven't got a chance—*wait, fool!*"

Down had dropped Captain Felix von Ziegler's suit-case and the case of brandy. A Leuger pistol whipped into his hand.

"Fight!" he shrilled. *"Deutschland, Deutschland, über Alles, über Alles in der Welt!"*

Lee never knew why he uttered that old battle cry. Perhaps even Captain Felix von Ziegler never knew. His Leuger started blazing. An automatic—the same one Lee had used in the Seventh Temple of Yama—came out of Dr. Lafferty's pocket. For a split-second bullets rained against the lip of the conning tower, and Lee hurled his grenades.

The boat shook. The world seemed to rock. Somewhere below Lee Holly Blunt was crying. Somewhere out of the smoke and din, Captain Felix von Ziegler's dying voice was crying weakly.

"Kamerad!"

A battering, hammering and clawing came a few minutes later. Old Eternity Bill Mandell was coming. With him was Blunt and the old tearing, clawing crew of men from the *Colorado* and the *Arizona.*

"Patience, admiral, patience!" Mandell was saying. "It pays in the long run. And do you know what I'm going to do? Well, I'm retiring and adopting Dark Flower. Taking her east. Sending her to school. She'll be a lot of company for an old bat like me. . . . Why, the kid knew a lot more than they thought. . . ."

And later Takahasha was almost crying.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," he was saying, "with all my heart I offer my apologies for ever doubting you. . . ."

But it did not matter. Nothing mattered. Andrew Lee was down on his knees there in the conning tower, holding Holly Blunt in his arms. Her tears were like a cooling rain against his cheek. And like that with Lee's arms still around her—they found them.

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